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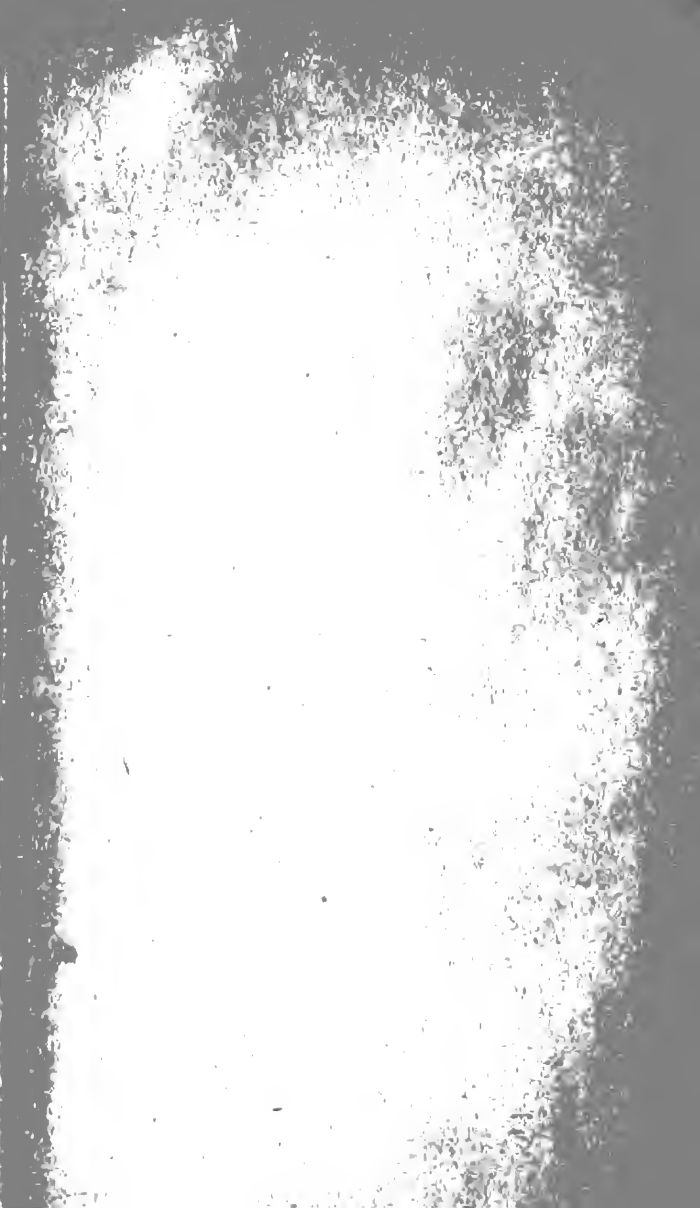
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HIS
FORTUNATE
GRACE

GERTRUDE
ATHERTON



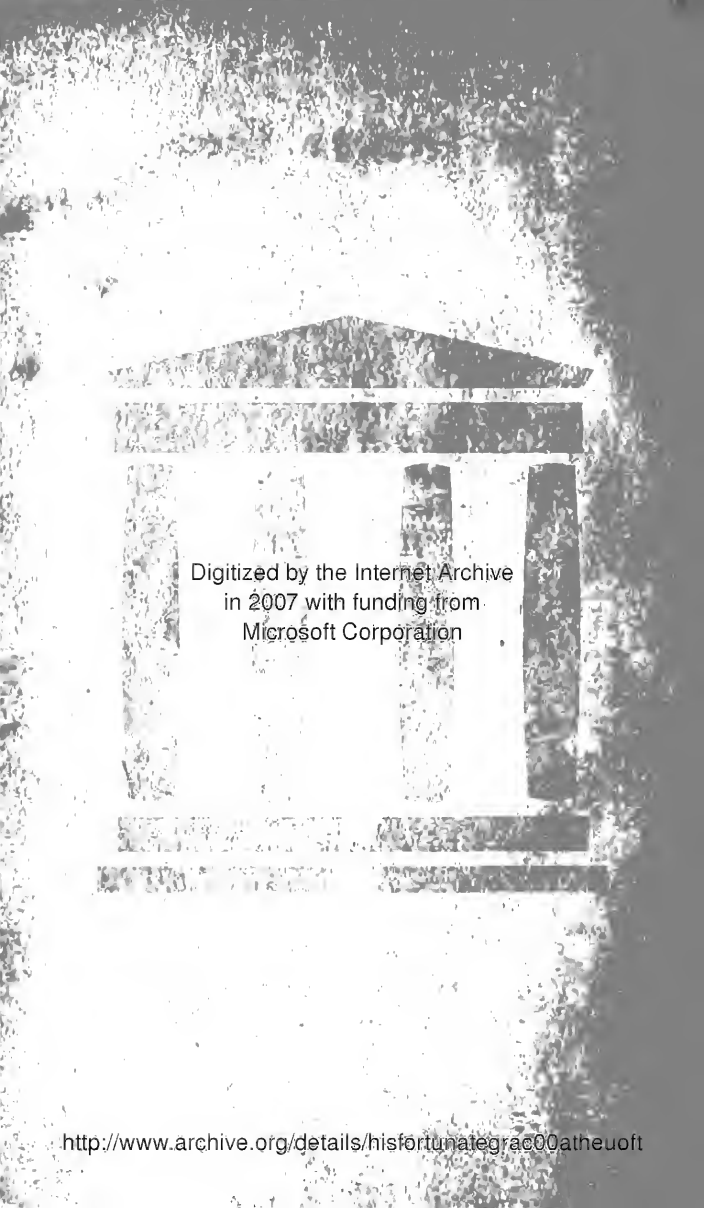








HIS FORTUNATE GRACE



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His Fortunate Grace

By

Gertrude Atherton

Author of *A Whirl Asunder*, *The Doomswoman*,
Patience Sparhawk and her Times,
Before the Gringo Came, Etc.



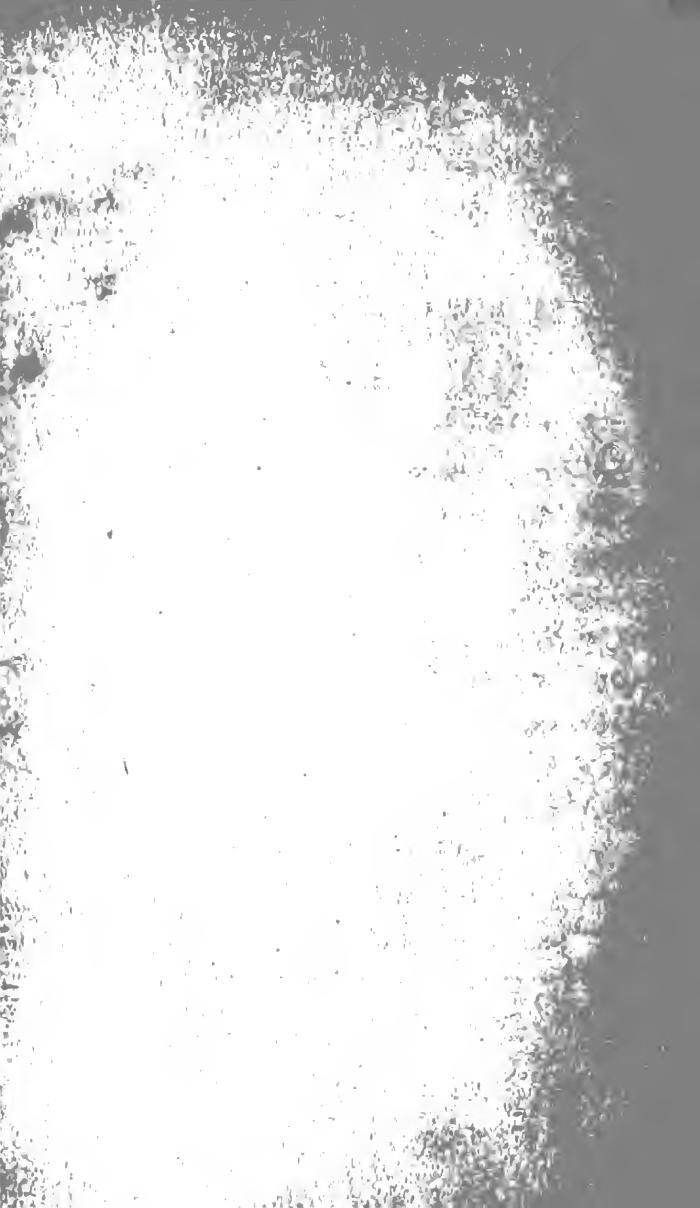
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1897

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TO
ALEECE VAN BERGEN.



HIS FORTUNATE GRACE.

CHAPTER I.

“ARE you quite sure?” Mr. Forbes laid down his newspaper, and looked with slightly extended mouth at his daughter who leaned forward in an attitude of suppressed energy, her hands clasped on the edge of the breakfast-table. The heiress of many millions was not handsome: her features were large and her complexion dull; but she had the carriage and ‘air’ of the New York girl of fashion, and wore a French morning-toilette which would have ameliorated a Gorgon.

“Quite sure, papa.”

“I suppose you have studied the question exhaustively.”

“Oh, yes, indeed. I have read Karl Marx and Henry George and a lot of others. I suppose you have not forgotten that I belong to a club of girls who aspire to be something more than fashionable butterflies, and that we read together?”

“And you are also positive that you wish me to divide my fortune with my fellow-men, and deprive you of the pleasant position of heiress?”

“Perfectly positive,” firmly. “It is terrible, terrible to think of the starving thousands. I feel it my duty to tell you, papa, that if you do not do this yourself, I shall—when—when—but I cannot even think of that.”

“No; don’t worry about it. I’m good for twenty or thirty years yet——”

“You are the handsomest and most distinguished-looking man in New York.”

“Thanks. To proceed: I should say that you are likely to be several things meanwhile.

I don't know that I shall even take the trouble to alter my will. Still, I may—that is unless you convert me. And you are also convinced that women should have the vote?"

"Yes! Yes! Indeed I am. I know all the arguments for and against. I've heard and read everything. You see, if we get the vote we can bring Socialism about quite easily."

"Without the slightest difficulty, I should say, considering the homogeneity of the feminine mind."

"You darling sarcastic thing. But can't you see what weight such women as we are interesting in the cause *must* have? We have carefully excluded the *nouveau riche*; only the very oldest and most notable names will be on our petition when we get it up."

"Oh, you are going to get up a petition? Well, let that pass for the present. Suppose you fall in love and want to marry?"

“I shall tell him everything. What I intend to make of my life—do with what wealth I have at my disposal. If he does not sympathize with me and agree to my plans, he must go. A woman’s chief end is not matrimony.”

“I need not ask if you have ever been in love?”

“Oh, of course, I want to be, dreadfully. All women do—even we advanced women—now, papa! I don’t love you quite so well when you smile like that. I am twenty-one, and that is quite old for a girl who has been highly educated, has travelled, and been out two years. I have a right to call myself advanced, because I have gone deliberately into the race, and have read up a great deal, even if I have as yet accomplished nothing. Exactly how much are you worth, papa?”

“Broadly speaking, about thirty millions. As a great deal of that is in railroad and other

stock, I am liable to be worth much less any day; much is also in land, which is worth only what it will bring. Still, I should say that I am reasonably sure of a fair amount."

"It is terrible, papa! All that land! Do give some of it at least to the poor dear people—I assure you we feel that we have taken them under our wing, and have grown quite sentimental over them. Mr. George would tell you what to do, at once. That man's very baggy knees fascinate me: he is so magnificently in earnest. When he scolded us all for being rich, the other day at the meeting, I loved him."

"It is a great relief to me that George is a married man. Well, my dear, your allowance is ten thousand dollars a year. Do what you please with it, and come to me if your fads and whims demand more. God forbid that I should stand in the way of any woman's

happiness. By the by, what does your mother think of this business?"

"She is *most* unsympathetic."

"So I should imagine," said Mr. Forbes, drily. "Your mother is the cleverest woman I know."

CHAPTER II.

AFTER luncheon, Miss Forbes hied herself to a drawing-room meeting in behalf of Socialism. Despite the fact that she had elected the rôle of mental muscularity, she gave studious application to her attire: her position and all that pertained to it were her enduring religion; the interests of the flashing seasons were unconsciously patronised rather than assimilated. As she walked up the Avenue toward the house of her friend, Mrs. Latimer Burr, she looked like a well-grown lad masquerading in a very smart outfit of brown tweed, so erect and soldierly was her carriage, so independent her little stride. A bunch of violets was pinned to her muff, another at her throat,

and she wore a severe little toque instead of the picture-hat she usually affected.

She smiled as she swung along, and one or two women looked back at her and sighed. She was quite happy. She had never known an ungratified wish; she was spoken of in the newspapers as one of the few intellectual young women in New York society; and now she had a really serious object in life. She felt little spasms of gratification that she had been born to set the world to rights—she and a few others: she felt that she was not selfish, for she grudged no one a share in the honours.

When she reached Mrs. Burr's house, high on the Avenue, and overlooking the naked trees and the glittering white of the Park, she found that other toilettes had taken less time than hers: several of her friends complimented the occasion with a punctuality which she commended without envy.

The large drawing-room, which was to be the scene of operations, was a marvellous combination of every pale colour known to nature and art, and looked expectant of white-wigged dames, sparkling with satin and diamonds, tripping the mazes of the minuet with gentlemen as courtly as their dress was rich and colourous. But only a half-dozen extremely smart young women of the hoary Nineteenth Century sat in a group, talking as fast as seals on a rock; and the slim little hostess was compactly gowned in pearl-grey cloth, her sleek head dressed in the fashion of the moment.

She came forward, a lorgnette held close to her eyes. "How dear of you, Augusta, to be so prompt!" she said, kissing her lightly. "Dear me! I wish I could be as frightfully in earnest as the rest of you, but for the life of me I can't help feeling that it's all a jolly good lark—perhaps that's

the effect of my ex-sister-in-law, Patience Sparhawk, who says we are only playing at being alive. But we can't all have seventeen different experiences before we are twenty-four, including a sojourn in Murders' Row, and a frantic love affair with one's own husband——"

"Tell me, Hal, what is a woman like who has been through all that?" interrupted Augusta, her ears pricking with girlish curiosity. "Is she eccentric? Does she look old—or something?"

"She's not much like us," said Mrs. Burr, briefly. "You'll meet her in time; it's odd you never happened to, even if you weren't out. Of course she can't go out for a while yet; it would hardly be good taste, even if she wanted to."

"How interestingly dreadful to have had such a thing in the family. But I should think she would be just the one to take life seriously."

“Oh, she does; that's the reason she doesn't waste any time. Here is someone else. Who is it?—oh, Mary Gallatin.”

Augusta joined the group.

“Where is Mabel Creighton?” demanded one of the girls. “I thought she was coming with you.”

“Haven't you heard?” Miss Forbes, with an air of elaborate indifference, drew her eyelids together as if to focus a half-dozen women that were entering. “The Duke of Bosworth arrives to-day, and she has stayed at home to receive him.”

“Augusta! What do you mean? *What* Duke of Bosworth?”

“There is only one duke of the same name at a time, my dear. This is the Duke of Bosworth of Aire Castle—and I suppose a half-dozen others—of the West Riding, of the district of Craven, of the County of Yorkshire, England. He has five other titles, I believe;

and enjoys the honour of the friendship of Fletcher Cuyler."

"Well!"

"Mabel met him abroad, and got to know him quite well; and when he wrote her that he should arrive to-day, she thought it only hospitable to stay at home and receive him."

"Are they engaged? Augusta, *do* be an angel."

"I am sure I have not the slightest idea whether they are engaged or not. Mabel always has a flirtation on with somebody."

"What is he like? How perfectly funny! How quiet she has kept him. Is he good-looking—or—well, just like some of the others?"

"Mabel has merely mentioned him to me, and I have not seen his photograph."

"She'd make a lovely bride; and Mrs. Creighton has such exquisite taste—St. Thom-

as' would be a dream. I suppose he'll wear a grey suit with the trousers turned up and a pink shirt. I do hope he won't walk up the Avenue with her with a big black cigar in his mouth."

"Is that what we came here to talk about?" asked Miss Forbes, severely. "What difference does it make what a foreign titled thing looks like? We are here to discuss a question which will one day exterminate the entire order."

"True," exclaimed a dark-haired distinguished-looking girl who was mainly responsible for the intellectual reputation of her set, albeit not exempt from the witchery of fads. "We must stop gossiping and attend to business. Do you know that I am expected to speak? How am I to collect my thoughts?"

"You have so many, Alex," said Miss Forbes, admiringly, "that it wouldn't matter

if a few got loose. Have you prepared your speech? I have mine by heart."

"I have thought it out. I don't think I shall be frightened; it is really such a very serious matter."

"Have you spoken to your father?"

"Oh, we've talked it over, but I can't say that he agrees with us."

Augusta laughed consciously. "There are probably some points of similarity in our experiences. But we must be firm."

Some thirty women, gowned with fashionable simplicity, had arrived, and were seated in a large double semi-circle. They looked alert and serious. Mrs. Burr drifted aimlessly about for a moment, then paused before a table and tapped it smartly with her lorgnette.

"I suppose we may as well begin," she said. "I believe we are going to discuss to-day the—a—the advisability of women having the vote—franchise. Also Socialism. Miss

Maitland, who has thoroughly digested both subjects, and many more, has kindly consented to speak; and Dr. Broadhead is coming in later to give us one of his good scoldings. Alexandra, will you open the ball?"

"Hal, you are incorrigible," exclaimed Miss Maitland, drawing her dark brows together. "At least you might pretend to be in earnest. We think it very good of you to lend us your house, and we are delighted that you managed Dr. Broadhead so cleverly, but we don't wish to be flouted, for we, at least, are in earnest."

"Alexis, if you scold me, I shall cry. And I'll now be serious—I swear it. You know I admire you to death. Your French poetry is adorable; you have more ideas for decorating than any professional in New York, and you fence like a real Amazon. I am simply dying to hear you make a speech; but first let me see if Latimer is hiding anywhere."

She went out into the hall and returned in a moment. "It would be just like Latimer to get Fletcher Cuyler and listen, and then guy us. Now, Alexandra, proceed," and she seated herself, and applied her lorgnette to her bright quizzical eyes.

Miss Maitland, somewhat embarrassed by her introduction, stepped to the middle of the room and faced her audience. She gave a quick sidelong glance at her skirts. They stood out like a yacht under full sail. She was a fine looking girl, far above woman's height, with dignified features, a bright happy expression, and a soft colour. She was a trifle nervous, and opened her jacket to gain time, throwing it back.

"That's a Paquin blouse," whispered a girl confidently to Augusta.

"Sh-h!" said Miss Forbes severely.

Miss Maitland showed no further symptom of nervousness. She clasped her hands lightly

and did not make a gesture nor shift her position during her speech. Her repose was very impressive.

“I think we should vote,” she said decidedly. “It will not be agreeable in many respects, and will heavily increase our responsibilities, but the reasons for far outweigh those against. A good many of us have money in our own names. We all have large allowances. Some day we may have the terrible responsibility of great wealth. The income-tax is in danger of being defeated. If we get the vote, we may do much toward making it a law, and it is a move in the right direction towards Socialism. Our next must be towards persuading the Government to take the railroads. It is shocking that the actual costs of transit should be so small, the charges so exorbitant and the profits so enormous. I feel this so oppressively that every time I make a long journey by rail, I give the

equivalent of my fare to the poor at once. It is a horrifying thing that we on this narrow island of New York city should live like hot-house plants in the midst of a malarious swamp: that almost at our back doors the poor are living, whole families in one room, and on one meal a day. My father gives me many thousands a year for charity, but charity is not the solution of the problem. There must be a redistribution of wealth. Of course I have no desire to come down to poverty; I am physically unfit for it, as are all of us. We should have sufficient left to insure our comfort; but any woman with brain can get along without the more extravagant luxuries. "It is time that we did something to justify our existence, and if the law required that we worked two or three hours a day instead of leading the idle life of pleasure that we do——"

"We are ornamental; that is something,"

exclaimed a remarkably pretty woman. "I am sure the people outside love to read about and look at us. Society gossip is not written for *us*."

Miss Maitland smiled. "You certainly are ornamental, Mary," she said; "but fancy how much more interesting you would be if you were useful as well." ↓

"I'd lose my good looks."

"Well, you can't keep them for ever. You should cultivate a substitute meanwhile, and then you never need be driven back into the ranks of *passée*, disappointed women. Faded beauties are a bore to everybody."

"I refuse to contemplate such a prospect. Alex, you are getting to be a horrid rude advanced New Woman."

Mrs. Burr clapped her hands. "How delightful!" she cried, "I didn't know we were to have a debate."

"Now keep quiet, all of you," said Miss

Maitland; "I have not finished. Mary Gallatin, don't you interrupt me again. Now that we understand this question so thoroughly, we must have more recruits. Of course, hundreds of women of the upper class are signing the petition asking for the extension of the franchise to our sex, but few of them are interested in Socialism. And if it is to be brought about, it must be by us. I have little faith in the rag-tag bob-tail element at present enlisted in that cause. They not only carry little weight with the more intelligent part of the community, but I have been assured that they would not fight—that they take it out in talk; that if ever there was a great upheaval, they would let the anarchists do the killing, and then step in, and try to get control later.

"Now, I thoroughly despise a coward; so do all women; and I have no faith in the propagandism of men that won't fight. What we must do is to enlist our men.

They are luxurious now, and love all that pertains to wealth; but, as Wellington said once of the same class in England: 'The puppies can fight!' Not that our men are puppies—don't misunderstand me—but you know what I mean. They would only seem so to a man who had spent his life in the saddle.

"It has been said that the Civil War took our best blood, and that that is the reason we have no great men now; all the most gallant and high-minded and ambitious were killed—although I don't forget that Mr. Forbes could be anything that he chose. I suppose he thinks that American statesmanship has fallen so low that he scorns to come out avowedly as the head of his party, and merely amuses himself pulling the wires. But I feel positive that if a tremendous crisis ever arose, it would be Mr. Forbes who would unravel the snarl.

You can tell him that, Augusta, with my compliments.

“Now, I have come to the real point of what I have to say. It was first suggested to me by Helena Belmont when she was on here last, and it has taken a strong hold on my mind. We must awaken the soul in our men—that is what they lack. The germ is there, but it has not been developed; perhaps I should say that the soul of the American people rose to its full flower during the Civil War, and then withered in the reaction, and in the commercial atmosphere which has since fitted our nation closer than its own skin. Miss Belmont says that nothing will arouse the men but another war; that they will be nothing but a well-fed body with a mental annex until they once more have a ‘big atmosphere’ to expand in. But I don’t wholly agree with her, and the

thought of another such sacrifice is appalling. I believe that the higher qualities in man can be roused more surely by woman than by bloodshed, and that if we, the women of New York, the supposed orchids, butterflies, or whatever people choose to call us, whose luxury is the cynosure and envy of the continent, could be instrumental in giving back to the nation its lost spiritual quality—understand, please, that I do not use the word in its religious sense—it would be a far greater achievement than any for which the so-called emancipated women are vociferating. The vote is a minor consideration. If we acquire the influence over men that we should, we shall not need it. And personally, I should dispense with it with great pleasure.”

“Bravo ! young lady,” exclaimed a vibrating resonant voice, and a clerical man entered the room to the clapping of many

hands. His eyes were keen and restless, his hair and beard black and silver, and there was a curious disconcerting bald spot on his chin. He looked ready to burst with energy.

“Thank you all very much, but don’t clap any more, for I have only a few minutes to spare. How do you do, Mrs. Burr? Yes, that was a very good speech—I have been eavesdropping, you see. Feminine, but I am the last to quarrel with that. It is not necessary for a woman to be logical so long as her instincts are in the right direction. Well, I will say a few words to you; but they must be few as I am very hoarse: I have been speaking all day.” He strode about as he talked, and occasionally smote his hands together. He was a very emphatic speaker, and, like all crusaders, somewhat theatrical.

“I agree with all that Miss Maitland has

said to you—with the exception of her views on Socialism. I don't believe Socialism to be the solution of our loathsome municipal degradation nor of the universal social evil. But I have no time to go into that question to-day. The other part—that you must awaken the soul of the men of your class—I most heartily endorse. The gentlemen alone can save this country—snatch it from the hands of plebeians and thieves. In them alone lies the hope of American regeneration. When I read of a strapping young man who has been educated at Harvard, or Yale, or Princeton, who is an expert boxer, fencer, whip, oarsman, yachtsman, addicted to all manly sport, in fact—when I read of such a man having tortoise-shell brushes with diamond monograms, diamond garter buckles, and thirty sets of silk pyjamas—never see their names in the paper except as ushers at

weddings, or as having added some new trifle to their costly apartments, it makes me sick—sick ! A war would rouse these young men, as Miss Maitland suggests; I haven't the slightest doubt that they would fight magnificently, and that those who survived would be serious and useful men for the rest of their lives. But we don't want war, and you must do the rousing. Make them vote—vote—nullify the thieving lying cormorants who are fattening on your country, and ruining it morally and financially, as well as making it the scorn and jest of Europe. And make them vote, not only this year, but every year for the rest of their lives, and on every possible question. It is to be hoped, indeed, that no war will come to awaken their manhood—we don't want to pay so hideous a price as that, and it is shocking that it has been found necessary to suggest it. But what we do

want is a great moral war. Lash them into that, and see that they do not break ranks until they have honest men in the legislature, in Congress, and in every municipal office in the country. Now, I must be off," and waving a hasty adieu, he shot out.

"For my part," said Mrs. Burr, above the enthusiastic chorus, "I am delighted that he didn't uphold Socialism. I'll undertake the reformation of Latimer, although it will probably give me wrinkles and turn me grey, but I won't have him giving up his 'boodle,' as they say out West; not I! not I!"

"Gally is hopeless," said that famous clubman's wife, with a sigh. "I shall have to work on someone else."

"It will be lots more interesting," murmured her neighbour.

"How shall we begin?" asked Mrs. Burr, wrinkling her smooth brow. "Put

them on gruel and hot water for awhile? I am sure they are hopeless so long as they eat and drink so much."

"I suppose all we girls will have to marry," remarked one of them.

"Well, you would, anyhow," said Mrs. Burr, consolingly.

"I shall not marry until I find the right man," said Augusta firmly, "not if I die an old maid. But father would be a splendid convert, and his name would carry great weight."

"You mean for Socialism," replied her hostess. "No man does his political duty more religiously than Mr. Forbes. But let us send Socialism to—ahem—and just work at the other thing. I am dying to see how Latimer will take it."

"Never!" exclaimed Augusta, and was echoed loyally. "We must not lose sight of that. I don't at all agree with Dr.

Broadhead on that point. I have fully made up my mind to bring papa round."

"But you are at a disadvantage, darling," said Mrs. Burr, drily; "your beautiful mamma thinks we are all a pack of idiots, and your father has a great respect for her opinion, to say nothing of being more or less *épris*."

"I shall convert her too," said Augusta sturdily.

Mrs. Burr laughed outright. "I can just see Mrs. Forbes posing as a prophet of Socialism. Well, let us eat. Alexis, you must be limp all the way down, and your thinker must be fairly staggering. I will pour you a stiff cup of tea and put some rum in it."

Augusta rose. "I must go, Hal," she said. "I have a speech to make myself in the slums, you know. Aren't you coming?"

"I? God forbid! But do take some-

thing before you go. It may save you from stage-fright."

"I haven't a minute. I must be there in twenty. Who is coming with me?"

Eight or ten of the company rose and hurried out with her; the rest gathered about the tea-table and relieved their mental tension in amicable discussion of the lighter matters of the day.

CHAPTER III.

A FOOTMAN had taken the Duke of Bosworth's cards up to Miss Mabel Creighton and her mother. The young man had arrived but an hour before and still wore his travelling gear, but had been given to understand that an English peer was welcome in a New York drawing-room on any terms. The drawing-room in which he awaited the American maiden who had taken his attenuated fancy was large and sumptuous and very expensive. There were tables of ormolu, and cabinets of tortoise-shell containing collections of cameos, fans and miniatures, a *lapis lazuli* clock three feet high, and a piano inlaid with twenty-seven different woods. The walls were frescoed by a famous hand, and there were lamps

and candle-brackets and various articles of decoration which must have been picked up in extensive travels.

The Duke noted everything with his slow listless gaze. He sat forward on the edge of his chair, his chin pressed to the head of his stick. He was a small delicately-built man, of thirty or more. His shoulders had rounded slightly. His cheeks and lower lip were beginning to droop. The pale blue eyes were dim, the lids red. He was a debauchee, but "a good sort," and men liked him.

He did not move during the quarter of an hour he was kept waiting, but when the *portière* was pushed aside he rose quickly, and went forward with much grace and charm of manner. The girl who entered was a dainty blonde fluffy creature, and looked like a bit of fragile china in the palatial room.

"How sweet of you to come so soon," she said, with frank pleasure. "I did not ex-

pect you for an hour yet. Mamma will be down presently. She is quite too awfully anxious to meet you."

The Duke resumed his seat and leaned back this time, regarding Miss Creighton through half-closed eyes. His expression was much the same as when he had inventoried the room.

"I came to America to see you," he said.

The colour flashed to her hair, but she smiled gracefully. "How funny! Just as if you had run over to pay me an afternoon call. Did the trip bore you much?"

"I am always bored at sea when I am not ill. I am usually ill."

"Oh! Really? How horrid! I am never ill. I always find the trip rather jolly. I go over to shop, and that would keep me up if nothing else did. Well, I think it was very good indeed of you—awfully good—to brave

the horrors of the deep, or rather of your state-room, just to call on me."

She had a babyish voice and a delightful manner. The Duke smiled. He was really rather glad to see her again. "You were good enough to ask me to call if I ever came over," he said, "and it occurred to me that it would be a jolly thing to do. I only had little detached chats with you over there, and there were always a lot of Johnnies hanging about. I felt interested to see you in your own surroundings."

"Oh—perhaps you are going to write a book? I have always felt dreadfully afraid that you were clever. Well, don't make the mistake of thinking that we have only one type over here, as they always do when they come to write us up. There are just ten girls in my particular set—we have sets within sets, as you do, you know—and we are each one of us quite different from all the others. We

are supposed to be the intellectual set, and Alexandra Maitland and Augusta Forbes are really frightfully clever. I don't know why they tolerate me—probably because I admire them. Augusta is my dearest friend. Alex pats me on the head and says that I am the leaven that keeps them from being a sodden lump of grey matter. I have addled my brains trying to keep up with them."

"Don't; you are much more charming as you are."

"Oh, dear! I don't know. Men always seem to get tired of me," she replied, with just how much ingenuousness the Duke could not determine. "Mrs. Burr says it is because I talk a blue streak and say nothing. Hal is quite too frightfully slangy. Augusta kisses me and says I am an inconsequential darling. She made me act in one of Howell's comedies once, and I did it badly on purpose, in the hope of raising my reputation, but Augusta

said it was because I couldn't act. Fletcher Cuyler, who is the most impertinent man in New York said—— Have you seen Fletcher?"

"He came out on the tug to meet me, and left me at the door."

"I believe if Fletcher really has a deep down affection for anyone, it is for you—I mean for any man. He is devoted to all of us, and he is the only man we chum with. But we wouldn't have him at the meeting to-day. Do you know that I should have lent my valuable presence to two important meetings this afternoon?"

"Really?" The Duke was beginning to feel a trifle restless.

"Yes, we are going in frightfully for Socialism, you know—Socialism and the vote—and—oh, dozens of other things. Alex said we must, and so we did. It's great fun. We make speeches. At least, I don't, but the

others do. Should you like to go to one of our meetings?"

"I should not!" said the Duke emphatically.

"Well, you must not make fun of us, for I am simply bent on having all the girls adore you, particularly Augusta. The other day we had a lovely meeting. It was here. I have the prettiest boudoir: Alex designed it. It looks just like a rainbow. I lay on the couch in a gown to match, and the girls all took off their stiff street frocks and put on my wrappers, and we smoked cigarettes and ate bonbons, and read Karl Marx. It was lovely! I didn't understand a word, but I *felt* intellectual—the atmosphere, you know. When we had finished a chapter and Alex had expounded it, and quarrelled over it with Augusta, we talked over all the men we knew, and I am sure men would be lots better if they knew what girls thought about them. Alex

says we must regenerate them, quicken their souls, so to speak, and I suppose I may as well begin on you, although you're not an American, and can't vote—we're for reforming the United States, you know. What is the state of your soul?" And again she gave her fresh childlike laugh.

"I haven't any. Give me up. I am hopeless." He was arriving at the conclusion that she was more amusing in detached chats, but reflected that she was certainly likeable. It was this last pertainment, added to the rumour of her father's vast wealth, that had brought him across the water.

"I don't know that I have ever seen one of the—what do they call them?—advanced women? But I am told that they are not Circean. That, indeed, seems to be their hall-mark. A woman's first duty is to be attractive."

"That's what Fletcher says. Augusta is

my most intimate friend, my very dearest friend, but I never saw a man look as if he was thinking about falling in love with her. How long shall you stay?" she added quickly, perceiving that he was tiring of the subject.

"I?—oh—I don't know. Until you tell me that I bore you. I may take a run into Central America with Fletcher."

"Into what? Why that's days, and days, and days from here, and must be a horrid place to travel in."

"I thought Chicago was only twenty-four hours from New York."

"Oh, you funny, funny, deliciously funny Englishman! Why Central America doesn't belong to the United States at all. It's 'way down between North and South America or somewhere. I suppose you mean middle America. We call Chicago and all that part of the country West."

“If it's middle it's central,” said the Duke, imperturbably. “You cannot expect me to command the vernacular of your enormous country in a day.”

He rose suddenly. A woman some twenty years older than Mabel had entered. Her face and air were excessively, almost aggressively refined, her carriage complacent, a trifle insolent. She was the faded prototype of her daughter. The resemblance was close and prophetic.

“My dear Duke,” she said, shaking him warmly by the hand, “I am so flattered that you have come to us at once, and so glad to have the opportunity to thank you for your kindness to Mabel when she was in your dear delightful country. Take that chair, it is so much more comfortable.” She herself sat upon an upright chair, and laid one hand lightly over the other. Her repose of manner was absolute. “The happiest days of my life

were spent in England, when I was first married—it seems only day before yesterday—my husband and I went over and jaunted about England and Scotland and Wales in the most old-fashioned manner possible. For six months we rambled here and there, seeing everything—one was not ashamed of being a tourist in those days. We would not present a letter, we wanted to have a real honeymoon: we were so much in love. And to think that Aire Castle is so near that terrible Strid. I remember that we stood for an hour simply fascinated. Mr. Creighton wanted to take the stride, but I wouldn't let him. He has never been over with me since—he is so busy. I can't think how Mr. Forbes always manages to go with his wife, unless it is true that he is jealous of her—although in common justice I must add that if she has ever given him cause no one knows it. I suppose it is on general principles, because she is such a beauty. Still

I must say that if I were a man and married to a Southern woman I should want to get rid of her occasionally: they *are* so conceited and they do rattle on so about nothing. Virginia Forbes talks rather less than most Southern women; but I imagine that is to enhance the value of her velvety voice."

The Duke, who had made two futile efforts to rise, now stood up resolutely.

"I am very sorry——" he began.

"Oh! *I* am so sorry you *will* rush away," exclaimed his hostess. "I have barely heard you speak. You must come with us to the opera to-night. Do. Will you come informally to an early dinner, or will you join us in the box with Fletcher?"

"I will join you with Fletcher. And I must go—I have an engagement with him at the hotel—he is waiting for me. You are very kind—thanks, awfully. So jolly to

be so hospitably received in a strange country."

When he reached the side-walk, he drew a long breath. "My God!" he thought, "Is it a disease that waxes with age? Perhaps they get wound up sometimes and can't stop. . . . And she is pretty now, but it's dreadful to have the inevitable sprung on you in that way. What are the real old women like, I wonder? They must merely fade out like an old photograph. I can't imagine one of them a substantial corpse. I shall feel as if I were married to a dissolving view. She is charming now, but—oh, well, that is not the only thing to be taken into consideration."

The Creighton house was on Murray Hill. He crossed over to Fifth Avenue and walked down toward the Waldorf, absently swinging his stick, regardless of many curi-

ous glances. "I wonder," he thought, "I wonder if I ever dreamed of a honeymoon with the one woman. If I did, I have forgotten. What a bore it will be now."

CHAPTER IV.

AUGUSTA returned home at six o'clock, not flushed with triumph, for she was too tired, but with an elated spirit. She had stood on a platform in an East Side hall surrounded by her friends, and to two dozen bedraggled females had made the first speech of her life. And it had been a good speech; she did not need assurance of that. She had stood as well as Alexandra Maitland, but had used certain little emphatic gestures (she was too independent to imitate anyone); and she had, with well-bred lack of patronage, assured her humble sisters, for three quarters of an hour, that they must sign the petition for Woman Franchise, and make all the other

women on the East Side sign it: in order that they might be able to put down the liquor trust, reform their husbands, secure good government, and be happy ever after. She flattered herself that she had not used a single long word—and she prided herself upon her vocabulary—that she had spoken with the simplicity and directness which characterized great orators and writers. Altogether, it was an experience to make any girl scorn fatigue; and when she entered her boudoir and found Mabel Creighton, she gave her a dazzling smile of welcome, and embraced her warmly. Mabel responded with a nervous hug and shed a tear.

“He’s here!” she whispered ecstatically.

“Who?—Oh, your Duke. Did he propose right off? Do tell me.” And she seated herself close beside her friend, and forgot that she was reforming the United States.

“No, but he told me that he had come over on purpose to see me.”

“That’s equal to a proposal,” said Augusta decidedly. “Englishmen are very cautious. They are much better brought up than ours. Which is only another warning that we must take ours in hand. It is shocking the way they frivel. I’d rather you married an American for this reason; but if you love the Duke of Bosworth, I have nothing to say. Besides, you’re the vine-and-tendril sort; I don’t know that you’d ever acquire any influence over a man; so it doesn’t much matter. Now tell me about the Duke, dearest; I am so glad that he has come.”

Mabel talked a steady stream for a half-hour, then hurried home to dress for the evening.

Mr. Forbes was standing before the fire in the drawing-room when his daughter

entered, apparelled for the opera and subsequent ball. She wore a smart French gown of pale blue satin, a turquoise comb in her pale modishly dressed hair, and she carried herself with the spring and grace of her kind; but she was very pale, and there were dark circles about her eyes.

“You look worn out, my dear,” said her father, solicitously. “What have you been doing?”

Miss Forbes sank into a chair. “I went to two meetings, one at Hal’s and one in the slums. I spoke for the first time, and it has rather taken it out of me.”

“Would the victory of your ‘cause’ compensate for crow’s feet?”

“Indeed it would. I really do not care. I am so glad that I have no beauty to lose. I might not take life so seriously if I had. I am beginning to have a suspicion that Mary Gallatin and several others have merely

taken up these great questions as a fad. Here comes mamma. I am glad, for I am hungry. I had no time for tea to-day."

A *portière* was lifted aside by a servant, and Mrs. Forbes entered the room. But for the majesty of her carriage she looked younger than her daughter, so exquisitely chiselled were her features, so fresh and vivid her colouring. Virginia Forbes was thirty-nine and looked less than thirty. Her tall voluptuous figure had not outgrown a line of its early womanhood, her neck and arms were Greek. A Virginian by birth, she inherited her high-bred beauty from a line of ancestors that had been fathered in America by one of Elizabeth's courtiers. Her eyes had the slight fullness peculiar to the Southern woman; the colour, like that of the hair, was a dark brown warmed with a touch of red. Her curved, scarlet mouth was not full, but the lips

were rarely without a pout, which lent its aid to the imperious charm of her face. There were those who averred that upon the rare occasions when this lovely mouth was off guard it showed a hint in its modelling of self-will and cruelty. But few had seen it off guard.

She wore a tiara of diamonds, and on her neck three rows of large stones depending lightly from fine gold chains. Her gown was of pale green velvet, with a stomacher of diamonds. On her arm she carried an opera cloak of emerald green velvet lined with blue fox.

Mr. Forbes' cold brilliant eyes softened and smiled as she came toward him, flirting her lashes and lifting her chin. For this man, whose eyes were steel during all the hours of light, who controlled the destinies of railroads and other stupendous enterprises and was the back-bone of his

political party, who had piled up millions as a child piles up blocks, and who had three times refused the nomination of his party for the highest gift of the nation, had worshipped his wife for twenty-two years. He turned toward his home at the close of each day with a pleasure that never lost its edge, exulting in the thought that ambition, love of admiration, and the onerous duties of the social leader could not tempt his wife to neglect him for an hour. He lavished fortunes upon her. She had an immense allowance to squander without record, a palace at Newport and another in the North Carolina mountains, a yacht, and jewels to the value of a million dollars. In all the years of their married life he had refused her but one dear desire—to live abroad in the glitter of courts, and receive the homage of princes. He had declined

foreign missions again and again. "The very breath of life for me is in America," he had said with final decision. "And if I wanted office I should prefer the large responsibilities of the Presidency to the nagging worries of an Ambassador's life. The absurdities of foreign etiquette irritate me now when I can come and go as I like. If they were my daily portion I should end in a lunatic asylum. They are a lot of tin gods, anyhow, my dear. As for you, it is much more notable to shine as a particular star in a country of beauties, than to walk away from a lot of women who look as if they had been run through the same mould, and are only beauties by main strength." And on this point she was forced to submit. She did it with the better grace because she loved her husband with the depth and tenacity of a strong and passionate nature. His brain and will, the nobility and generosity

of his character, had never ceased to exercise their enchantment, despite the men that paid her increasing court. Moreover, although the hard relentless pursuit of gold had aged his hair and skin, Mr. Forbes was a man of superb appearance. His head and features had great distinction; his face, when the hours of concentration were passed, was full of magnetism and life, his eyes of good-will and fire. His slender powerful figure betrayed little more than half of his fifty-one years. He was a splendid specimen of the American of the higher civilisation: with all the vitality and enthusiasm of youth, the wide knowledge and intelligence of more than his years, and a manner that could be polished and cold, or warm and spontaneous, at will.

For her daughter, Mrs. Forbes cared less. She had not the order of vanity which would have dispensed with a walking advertisement

of her years, but she resented having borne an ugly duckling, one, moreover, that had tiresome fads. She had been her husband's confidante in all his gigantic schemes, financial and political, and Augusta's intellectual kinks bored her.

She crossed the room and gave her husband's necktie a little twist. Mr. Forbes sustained the reputation of being the best-groomed man in New York, but it pleased her to think that she could improve him. Then she fluttered her eyelashes again.

"Do I look very beautiful?" she whispered.

He bent his head and kissed her.

"When you two get through spooning," remarked Miss Forbes in a tired voice, "suppose we go in to dinner."

"Don't flatter yourself that it is all for you," Mrs. Forbes said to her husband, "I am to meet an English peer to-night."

“Indeed,” replied Mr. Forbes, smiling, “Have we another on the market? What is his price? Does he only want a roof? or will he take the whole castle, barring the name and the outside walls?”

“You are such an old cynic. This is the Duke of Bosworth, a very charming man, I am told. I don’t know whether he is poverty-stricken or not. I believe he paid Mabel Creighton a good deal of attention in the autumn, when she was visiting in England.”

“He wouldn’t get much with her: Creighton is in a tight place. He may pull out, but he has three children besides Mabel. However, there are plenty of others to snap at this titled fish, no doubt.”

“I hope not,” said Augusta. “Dear Mabel is very fond of him; I am sure of that. He only arrived to-day, and is going with them to the opera to-night. How are you to meet him?”

“Fletcher Cuyler will bring him to my box, of course. Are not all distinguished foreigners brought to my shrine at once?”

“True,” said Miss Forbes. “But *are* we going in to dinner? I have never heard Maurel in *Don Giovanni*, and I don’t want to lose more than the first act.”

“There is plenty of it. But let us go in to dinner, by all means.”

CHAPTER V.

THE two tiers of boxes at the Metropolitan Opera House reserved for the beauty and fashion of New York flashed with the plumage of women and a thousand thousand gems. Women of superb style, with little of artifice but much of art, gowned so smartly that only their intense vitality saved them from confusion with the fashion-plate, carrying themselves with a royal, albeit somewhat self-conscious air, many of them crowned like empresses, others starred like night, producing the effect *en masse* of resplendent beauty, and individually of deficiency in all upon which the centuries have set their seal, hung, two or three in a frame, against the curving walls and red background of the great house:

suspended in air, these goddesses of a new civilisation, as if with insolent challenge to all that had come to stare. To the music they paid no attention. They had come to decorate, not to listen; without them there would be no opera. The music lovers were stuffed on high, where they seemed to cling to the roof like flies. The people in the parquette and orchestra chairs, in the dress-circle and balconies, came to see the hundreds of millions represented in the grand tier. Two rows of *blasé* club faces studded the long omnibus box. Behind the huge sleeves and voluminous skirts that sheathed their proudest possessions, were the men that had coined or inherited the wealth which made this triumphant exhibition possible.

As the curtain went down on the second act and the boxes emptied themselves of their male kind that other male kind might enter to do homage, two young men took their

stand in the back of a box near the stage and scanned the house. One of them remarked after a few moments:

"I thought that all American women were beautiful. So far, I see only one."

"These are the New York fashionettes, my dear boy. Their pedigree is too short for aristocratic outline. You will observe that the pug is as yet unmitigated. Not that blood always tells, by any means: some of your old duchesses look like cooks. Our orchids travel on their style, grooming, and health, and you must admit that the general effect is stunning. Who is your beauty?"

"Directly in the middle of the house. Gad! she's a ripper."

"You are right. That is the prettiest woman in New York. And her pedigree is probably as good as yours."

"Who is she?"

"Mrs. Edward R. Forbes, the wife of one

of the wealthiest and most powerful men in the United States."

"Really!"

"That is her daughter beside her."

"Her what!"

"I always enjoy making that shot. It throws a flash-light on the pitiful lack of originality in man every time. But it is nothing for the petted wife of an American millionaire to look thirty when she is forty. It's the millionaire who looks sixty when he is fifty. I'm not including Forbes, by the way. That tall man of fine physique that has just left the box is he."

"Poor thing!"

"Oh, don't waste any pity on Forbes. He's the envy of half New York. She is devoted to him, and with good reason: there are few men that can touch him at any point. I shall take you over presently. The first thing a distinguished stranger, who has had the tip,

does when he comes to New York is to pay his court at that shrine. What a pity you are booked. That girl will come in for forty millions."

The other set his face more stolidly.

"Pounds?"

"Oh, no—dollars. But they'll do."

"I have not spoken as yet, although I don't mind saying that that is what I came over for."

"I suppose you are in pretty deep—too deep to draw out?"

"I don't know that I want to. I can be frank with you, Fletcher. Is her father solid? American fortunes are so deucedly rickety. I am perfectly willing to state brutally that I wouldn't—couldn't—marry Venus unless I got a half million (pounds) with her and something of an income to boot."

"As far as I know Creighton stands pretty well toward the top. You can never tell

though: American fortunes are so exaggerated. You see, the women whose husbands are worth five millions can make pretty much the same splurge as the twenty or thirty million ones. They know so well how to do it. For the matter of that there's one clever old *parvenu* here who has never handled more than a million and a half—as I happen to know, for I'm her lawyer—and who entertains with the best of them. Her house, clothes, jewels, are gorgeous. A shrewd old head like that can do a lot on an income of seventy thousand dollars a year. But Forbes, I should say, is worth his twenty millions—that's allowing for all embellishments—if he's worth a dollar, and Augusta is the only child. Unless America goes bankrupt, she'll come in for two-thirds of that one of these days, and an immense dot meanwhile."

At this moment Miss Creighton, who had been talking with charming vivacity to a

group of visitors, dismissed them with tactful badinage, and beckoned to the two men in the back of the box.

"Sit down," she commanded. "What do you think, Fletcher? I stayed away from two important meetings to-day in order to receive the Duke. Was not that genuine American hospitality?"

She spoke lightly; but as her eyes sought the Englishman's, something seemed to flutter behind her almost transparent face.

"These fads! These fads!" exclaimed the young man addressed as Fletcher. "Have you resigned yourself to the New Woman, Bertie? The New York variety is innocuous. They just have a real good time and the newspapers take them seriously and write them up, which they think is lovely."

"Nobody pays any attention to Fletcher Cuyler," said Miss Creighton with affected

disdain. "We will make you all stare yet."

The Duke smiled absently. He was looking toward the box in the middle of the tier.

"I think women should have whatever diversion they can find or invent," he said. "Society does not do much for them."

The curtain rose.

"Keep quiet," ordered Cuyler. "I allow no talking in a box which I honour with my presence. That isn't what I ruin myself for."

He was a tall nervous blonde bald-headed man of the Duke's age, with an imp-like expression and dazzling teeth. Despite the fact that he was unwealthed, he was a fixed star in New York society; he not only knew more dukes and princes than any other man in the United States, but was intimate with them. He had smart

English relatives and was a graduate of Oxford, where he had been the chosen friend of the heir to the Dukedom of Bosworth. His excessive liveliness, his adaptability and versatility, his audacity, eccentricities, cleverness, and his utter disregard of rank, had made him immensely popular in England. He was treated as something between a curio and a spoilt child; and if people guessed occasionally that his head was peculiarly level, they but approved him the more.

When the act was done and the box again invaded, Cuyler carried the Englishman off to call on Mrs. Forbes. Her box was already crowded, and Mr. Forbes stood just outside the door. As the Duke was introduced to him, he contracted his eyelids, and a brief glance of contempt shot from eyes that looked twenty years younger than the fish-like orbs which involuntarily

twitched as they met that dart. But Mr. Forbes was always courteous, and he spoke pleasantly to the young man of his father, whom he had known.

Cuyler entered the box. "Get out," he said, "everyone of you. I've got a live duke out there. He's mortgaged for the rest of the evening and time's short." He drove the men out, then craned his long neck round the half-open door.

"Dukee, dukee," he called, "come hither."

The Duke, summoning what dignity he could, entered, and was presented. After he had paid a few moments' court to Mrs. Forbes, Cuyler deftly changed seats with him and plunged into an animated dispute with his hostess anent the vanishing charms of *Don Giovanni*.

The Duke leaned over Miss Forbes' chair with an air of languor, which was due to

physical fatigue, contemplating her absently, and not taking the trouble to more than answer her remarks. Nevertheless, his prolonged if indifferent stare disturbed the girl who had known little susceptibility to men. There was something in the cold regard of his eye, the very weariness of his manner, which had its charm for the type of woman who is responsive to the magnetism of inertia, whom a more vital force repels.

And his title, all that it represented, the pages of military glory it rustled, appealed to the mind of the American girl who had felt the charm of English history. She was not a snob; she had given no thought to marrying a title; and if the man had repelled her, she would have relegated him to that far outer circle whence all were banished who bored her or achieved her disapproval; but a thin spell emanated from this cold self-contained personality and

stirred her languid pulse. Practical as she was, she had a girl's imagination, and she saw in him all that he had not, haloed with an ancient title; behind him a great sweep of historical canvas. Then she remembered her friend; and envied her with the most violent emotion of her life.

"Well, what do you think of her?" asked Cuyler of the Duke, as they walked down the lobby. "I don't mean *la belle dame sans merci*; there's only one opinion on that subject. But Augusta? do you think you could stand her? If Forbes took the notion he'd come down with five million dollars without turning a hair."

"I could swallow her whole and without a grimace," said the Duke drily. "But I am half, two-thirds committed. I have no intention of making Miss Creighton ridiculous, although I shall be obliged to tell her father frankly that I cannot marry her unless

he comes down with half a million. It's a disgusting thing to do, but I have no choice."

"Oh, don't go back on Mabel, of course. But I am sorry. However, *nous verrons*. If Creighton doesn't come to time, let me know. I am pretty positive I can arrange the other: I think I know my fair compatriot's weak spot. I suppose you go on with the Creightons to the big affair at the Schemmerhorn-Smiths to-night? Well, give Augusta a quarter of an hour or so of your flattering attentions. It will do no harm, in any event. I feel like a conspirator, but I'd like to see you on your feet. Gad! I wish I had a title; I wouldn't be in debt as long as you have been."

CHAPTER VI.

THE next day Cuyler took the Duke to call on Mrs. Forbes in her house. It was five o'clock and the lamps were lit. Augusta's particular set were there, talking Socialism over their tea, and enlightening a half-dozen young men and elderly club *roués*, who listened with becoming gravity. Mrs. Forbes sat somewhat apart by the tea-table talking to three or four men on any subject but Socialism. She wore a gown of dark-red velvet with a collar of Venetian lace and sat in a large high-backed chair of ebony, inlaid with ivory. The seat was also high, and she looked somewhat like a queen on her throne, graciously receiving the homage of her courtiers. The

drawing-room was twice as large as the Creighton's, the Duke noted as he entered. It was hung with dark-green velvet embroidered with a tree design in wood colour an inch thick. Every shade of green blended in the great apartment, and there was no other colour but the wood relief and the pink of the lamp-shades.

Mrs. Forbes did not rise, but she held out her hand to the stranger with so spontaneous a warmth that he felt as if he were receiving his first welcome in transatlantic parts. She had not shaken hands with him at the opera, and their brief conversation had been over her shoulder; he now found that her eyes and hand, her womanly magnetism and almost regal manner combined to effect the impression: "New York, *c'est moi*. My hospitality to the elect few who win my favour is sincere and unbounded, the bitter envy of the cold

and superfluous stranger without its gates; and, of all men, my dear Duke of Bosworth, you are the most genuinely welcome."

He wondered a little how she did it, but did not much care. It was a large beautiful gracious presence, and he was content, glad to bask in it. He forgot Augusta and Mabel, and took a low chair before her.

"I won't ask you how you like New York," she said, smiling again. She half divined his thoughts, and saw that he was clever despite an entire indifference to his natural abilities; and the sympathy of her nature conveyed what she thought.

"Oh, I do—now," he replied with unwonted enthusiasm. "I must say that the blind rush everybody seems to be in is a trifle disconcerting at first—it makes an Englishman feel, rather, as if his youngest child—the child

of his old age, as it were, was on a dead run, and that he must rush after to see what it was all about or be left behind like an old fogey. Upon my word I feel fully ten years older than I did when I landed."

She laughed so heartily that he felt a sudden desire to say something really clever, and wondered why he usually took so little trouble.

"That is the very best statement of one of our racial differences I have heard," she said; "I shall remember to tell it to my husband. He will be delighted. I feel the rush myself at times, for I was born in a far more languid climate. But New York is an electrifying place; it would fascinate you in time."

"It fascinates me already!" he said gallantly, "and it is certainly reposeful here."

"It is always the same, particularly at five o'clock," she replied.

"Does that mean that I can drop in sometimes at this hour?"

“*Will* you?”

“I am afraid I shall be tempted to come every day.”

“That would be our pleasure,” and again she smiled. It was a smile that had warmed older hearts than the weary young profligate’s. “Augusta is almost invariably here and I usually am. Occasionally I drive down to bring my husband home.”

The Duke understood her perfectly. Her graceful pleasure in meeting him was not to be misconstrued. As she turned to greet a new comer he regarded her closely. If she had not taken the trouble to convey her subtle warning, he should have guessed that she loved her husband. Then he fell to wondering what sort of a man Forbes was to have developed the abundant harvest of such a woman’s nature. “She could easily have been made something very different in the wrong hands,” he thought, “and not in one

respect only but in many. What a mess I should have made of a nature like that! Little Miss Creighton, with her meagre and neutral make-up is about all I am equal to. This woman might have lifted me up once; but more likely I should have dragged her down. She is all woman, the kind that is controlled and moulded by the will of a man."

His eyes rested on her mouth. "She will hurt Forbes some day, give him a pretty nasty time; but it won't be because she doesn't love him. And—she'll make him forget—when she gets ready. A man would forgive a woman like that anything."

She turned suddenly and met his eyes. "What are you thinking?" she demanded.

"That Mr. Forbes must be a remarkable man," he answered quickly. He rose. "I must go over and speak to Miss Forbes; but I shall come back."

Mabel's eyes were full of coquettish re-

proach. Augusta chaffed him for forgetting their existence. Her manner was not her mother's, but it was high-bred, and equally sincere. She presented him to the other girls, and to Mrs. Burr, who lifted her lorgnette, and regarded him with a prolonged and somewhat discomfiting stare. But it was difficult to embarrass the Duke of Bosworth. He went over and sat beside Mabel.

"I think I met him once," said Mrs. Burr to Augusta, "but he is so very unindividual that I cannot possibly remember."

"I think he is charming," said Miss Forbes. "I had quite a talk with him last night."

"He doesn't look stupid, but he's not precisely hypnotic."

"Oh, there's *something* about him!" exclaimed one of the other girls. "I feel sure that he's fascinating."

"He looks as though he knew so much of

the world," said another, with equal enthusiasm.

"What's the matter with us?" demanded one of the young men.

"You haven't a title," said Mrs. Burr.

"Hal, you are quite too horrid. I have not thought of his title—not once. But Norry, you *can't* look like that, no matter how hard you try."

"Oh yes I can; it's not so hard as you imagine; only it's not my chronic effect. When I am—ah—indiscreet enough to produce it, I have the grace to keep out of sight."

"That is not what I mean."

"Oh, he is an Englishman—with a title," said the young man, huffily. "Miss Maitland, have you caught the fever?"

"I have either had all, or have outgrown the children's diseases, and I class the title-fever among them. I know that some get it

late in life, but some people will catch anything. Our old butler has just had the mumps."

"That's a jolly way of looking at it."

"Oh you men are not altogether exempt," said Mrs. Burr. "But the funniest case is Ellis Davis. He's just come back from London with a wild Cockney accent, calls himself 'Daivis,' and says 'todai' and the Princess of 'Wailles,' and 'paiper.' Probably he also says 'caike' and 'laidy.' I can't think where he got it, for he must have had *some* letters, and you may bet your prospects he presented them."

"Possibly he saw more of the hotel servants and his barber than he did of the others," suggested Miss Maitland.

"Or his ear may be defective, or his memory bad, and he got mixed," replied Mrs. Burr. "We'll give him the benefit of the doubt; but I can't think why the most original people on

earth want to imitate anyone. And yet they say we hate the English. Great heaven! Why, we even drink the nasty concoction called English breakfast tea, a brand the English villagers would not give tuppence a pound for, simply because it has the magic word tacked on to it."

"We don't hate the English," said Augusta. "What nonsense. The Irish do, and the politicians toady to the Irish and control certain of the newspapers. That is all there is in it; but they make the most noise."

"And *we* grovel," said Mrs. Burr. "It is a pity we can't strike a happy medium."

"I think the greater part of the nation is indifferent," said Miss Maitland, "or at all events recognises the bond of blood and gratitude."

The Duke was making his peace with Mabel.

"I was afraid I bored you this morning,"

he said, "it is good of you not to tell me that you don't want to talk to me again for a week."

"You only stayed an hour. Did it seem so long?"

"I never paid a call of twenty minutes before," he said unblushingly.

"Oh, how sweet of you!"

"Not at all. Can I walk home with you? Is that proper?"

"Oh, there will be a lot of us together; and they will all want to talk to you."

"My valuable conversation shall be devoted to you alone." He hesitated a moment. "Shall you be at home this evening?"

She looked down, tucking the end of her glove under her cuff. "Yes, I rarely go out two nights in succession."

"May I call again?"

"Yes."

She looked up and met his eyes. "It has

to be done," thought the Englishman, "there's no getting out of it now, and I may as well take the plunge and get over it. And she certainly is likeable."

"They are going now," said Mabel.

He went over to Mrs. Forbes to make his adieux.

"I haven't given you any tea," she said. "It was stupid of me to forget it. You must come back to-morrow and have a cup."

"I shall come—for the tea," he said.

"And you must dine with us? Some day next week—Thursday?"

"Thanks, awfully; I'll come on any pretence."

"You must—Fletcher, take the Duke into the dining-room. It is so cold outside."

And to this invitation the Duke responded with no less grace, then walked home with Mabel and left her at her door, happy and elated.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. FORBES stood in his office, his eyes rivetted on a narrow belt of telegraph ticking which slipped loosely through his hands, yard after yard, from a machine on the table. As it fell to the floor and coiled and piled about him, until the upper part of his body alone was visible, it seemed to typify the rising waters of Wall Street. Outside, the city was white and radiant, under snow and electric light. In the comfortable office the curtains were drawn, a gas log flamed in the grate, and the electric loops were hot.

Mr. Forbes had stood motionless for an hour. His hat was on the back of his head. His brow was corrugated. His lips were pressed together, his eyes like flint. The sec-

retary and clerk had addressed him twice, but had been given no heed. The hieroglyphics on that strip of white paper sliding so rapidly through his fingers had his brain in their grip. For the moment he was a financial machine, nothing more.

Suddenly the ticking was softly brushed from his hands, the coils about him kicked apart by a little foot, and he looked down into the face of his wife. She was enveloped in sables; her cheeks were brilliant with the pink of health and cold. Mr. Forbes' brow relaxed; he drew a deep sigh and removed his hat.

"Well! I am glad I came for you," she exclaimed. "I believe you would have stood there all night. You looked like a statue. Is anything wrong?"

"I have merely stood here and watched a half million drift through my fingers," he said. "Northern Consolidated is dropping like a

parachute that won't open. But let us go home. I am very glad you came down."

When they were in the brougham she slipped her hand into his under cover of the rug. "Are you worried?" she asked.

"No; I don't know that I am. I can hold on, and when this panic is over the stock will undoubtedly go up again. I have only a million in it. But I am sorry for Creighton. About two-thirds of all he's got are in this railroad, and I'm afraid he won't be able to hold on. But let us drop the subject. The thing has got to rest until to-morrow morning, and I may as well rest, too. Besides, nothing weighs very heavily when I am at home. Are we booked for anything to-night?"

"There is Mary Gallatin's *musicale*. She has Melba and Maurel. And there is the big dance at the Latimer Burr's. But if you are

tired I don't care a rap about either. Augusta can go with Harriet."

"Do stay home; that's a good girl. I am tired; and what is worse, a lot of men will get me into the smoking-room and talk 'slump.' If I could spend the evening lying on the divan in your boudoir, while you read or played to me, I should feel that life was quite all that it should be."

"Well, you shall. We have so few good times together in winter."

He pressed her hand gratefully. "Tell me," he said after a moment, "do you think this Socialism mooning of Augusta's means anything?"

"No," she said contemptuously. "I hope that has not been worrying you. Girls must have their fads. Last year it was pink parrots; this year it is Socialism; next year it will be weddings. By the way, what do you think of the Duke?"

"I can't say I've thought about him at all."

"He is really quite charming."

"Is he? His title is, I suppose you mean. Have you seen him since?"

"Since when? Oh, the night of *Don Giovanni*. I forgot that you had not been home to tea this week. He has dropped in with Fletcher several times."

"Ah! Well, I hope he improves on acquaintance. What does Augusta think of this magnificent specimen of English manhood?"

"I think she rather likes him. She has seen much more of him than I have, and says that she finds him extremely interesting."

"Good God!"

"But he must have something to him, Ned dear, for Augusta is very *difficile*. I never heard her say that a man was interesting before."

“And she has been surrounded by healthy well-grown self-respecting Americans all her life. [The infatuation for titles is a germ disease with Americans, more particularly with New Yorkers. The moment the microbe strikes the blood, inflammation ensues, and the women that get it don't care whether the immediate cause is a man or a remnant.] Is his engagement to Mabel Creighton announced?”

“No; she told Augusta that he had spoken to her but not to her father—that Mr. Creighton was in such a bad humour about something she thought it best to wait a while. I suppose it is this Northern Consolidated business.”

“It certainly is. And if the Dukelet is impecunious, I am afraid Mabel won't get him, for there will be nothing to buy him with. Don't speak of this, however. Creighton may pull through: the stock may take a sudden

jump, or he may have resources of which I know nothing. I should be the last to hint that he was in a hole. Don't talk any more here; it strains the voice so."

They were jolting over the rough stones of Fifth Avenue, where speech rasped and wounded the throat. The long picturesque street of varied architecture throbbed with the life of a winter's afternoon. The swarm of carriages on the white highway looked like huge black beetles with yellow eyes, multiplying without end. The sidewalks were crowded with opposing tides; girls of the orchid world, brightly dressed, taking their brisk constitutional; young men, smartly groomed, promenading with the ponderous tread of fashion; business men, rushing for the hotels where they could hear the late gossip of Wall Street; the rockets of the opera company, splendidly arrayed, and carrying themselves with a haughty swing which chal-

lenged the passing eye; and the contingent that had come to stare. But snow-clouds had brought an early dusk, and all were moving homeward. By the time the Forbes reached their house in the upper part of the Avenue the sidewalks were almost deserted, and snow stars were whirling.

The halls and dining-room of the Forbes mansion were hung with tapestries; all the rooms, though home-like, were stately and imposing, subdued in colour and rich in effect. But if the house had been designed in the main as a proper setting for a very great lady, one boudoir and bedroom were the more personal encompassment of a beautiful and luxurious woman. The walls and windows and doors of the boudoir were hung with raw silk, opal hued. The furniture was covered with the same material. On the floor was a white velvet carpet, touched here and there with pale colour. The opal effect was enhanced

by the lamps and ornaments, which cunningly simulated the gem. In one corner was a small piano, enamelled white and opalized by the impressionist's brush.

The pink satin on the walls of the bedroom gleamed through the delicate mist of lace. A shower of lace half-concealed the low upholstered bed. The deep carpet was pink, the dressing-table a huge pink and white butterfly, with furnishings of pink coral inlaid with gold. A small alcove was walled with a looking-glass. Every four years, when Mr. Forbes was away at the National Convention, his wife refurnished these rooms. She was a woman of abounding variety and knew its potency.

Mr. Forbes passed the evening on the divan in the boudoir, while his wife, attired in a *negligée* of corn-coloured silk, her warm, heavy hair unbound, played Chopin with soft, smothered touch for an hour, then read to him

the latest novel. It was one of many evenings, and when he told her that he was the happiest man alive, she remarked to herself: "It would be the same. I love him devotedly. Nevertheless, during these next few weeks he shall not be allowed to forget just how happy I do make him."

CHAPTER VIII.

FLETCHER CUYLER was banging with all his might on the upright piano in one corner of the parlour of his handsome bachelor apartment. The door was thrown open and the servant announced in a solemn voice:

“His Grace, the Duke of Bosworth, sir.”

A bald crown and a broad grin appeared for a moment above the top of the piano.

“Sit down. Make yourself easy while I finish this. It’s a bravura I’m composing.” And he returned to the keys.

“I wish you’d stop that infernal racket,” said the Duke peevishly. “It’s enough to tear the nerves out of a man’s body. Besides, I want to talk to you.”

But Cuyler played out his bravura to the thundering end; then came leaping down the room, swinging his long legs in the air as if they were strung on wires.

The Duke was staring into the fire, huddled together. He looked sullen and miserable.

“Hallo!” cried his host. “What’s up? Anything wrong?”

“Nothing particular. I’ve made an infernal mess of things, that’s all. I hear on good authority that Creighton has never been worth more than a million or so at any time, and is losing money; and, without conceit, I believe I could have had Miss Forbes.”

“Conceit? You’d be a geranium-coloured donkey if you had the remotest doubt of the fact. She’s fairly lunged at you. I’ve known Augusta Forbes since she was in long clothes—she was called ‘Honey’

until she was ten, if you can believe it; but at that age she insisted upon Augusta or nothing. Well, where was I?—I never knew her to come off her perch before. She always went in more or less for the intellectual, and of late has been addling her poor little brain with the problems of the day. Well, the end is not yet. Have you spoken to Mr. Creighton?"

"No; I barely have the honour of his acquaintance. Upon the rare occasions when he graces his own table he's as solemn as a mummy. I'm willing to admit that I have not yet summoned up courage to ask him for an interview. He's polite enough, but he certainly is not encouraging."

"Oh, all the big men are grumpy just now. The richer they are the more they have to lose. Well, whichever way it works out, you have my best wishes. I'd like to see Aire Castle restored."

"I believe in my heart that's all I'm in this dirty business for. I don't enjoy the sensation of the fortune-hunter. If I have any strong interest left in life beyond seeing the old place as it should be I am not conscious of it."

"Come, come, Bertie, brace up, for God's sake. Have a brandy and soda. You'll be blowing your brains out the first thing I know. Can't you get up a little sentiment for Mabel Creighton? She's a dear little thing."

"I loved one woman once, and after she had ruined me, she left me for another man." He gave a short laugh. "She didn't have the decency to offer to support me, although she was making a good £60 a week. I don't appear to be as fortunate as some of my brothers. Oh, we are a lovely lot." He drank the brandy and soda, and resumed: "I have no love left in me

for any woman. Mabel Creighton is a girl to be tolerated, that is all; and more so than Miss Forbes. Nevertheless, I wish I had taken things more slowly and met the latter before I was committed. You may as well be killed for a sheep as a lamb, and I am afraid I am not going to get enough with Miss Creighton to make it worth while. If he offered me two hundred thousand pounds, I don't believe I'd have the assurance to refuse."

The servant entered and thrust out a granitic arm, at the end of which was a wedgewood tray supporting a note.

"From Mrs. Forbes," said Cuyler. He read the note. "She wants to see me at once," he added. "I wonder what's up. Well, I must leave you. Go or stay, just as you like. And good luck to you."

CHAPTER IX.

THE Englishman sat tapping the top of his shoe with his stick for some moments after Cuyler had left, then rose abruptly, left the building, and hailing a hansom, drove down town to Mr. Creighton's office in the Equitable Building. The elevator shot him up to the fifth floor, and after losing his way in the vast corridors several times, he was finally steered to his quarry.

A boy who sat by a table in the private hall-way reading the sporting extra of an evening newspaper, took in his card. Mr. Creighton saw him at once. The room into which the Duke was shown was large, simply furnished, and flooded with

light. The walls seemed to be all windows. The roar of Broadway came faintly up. A telegraph machine in the corner ticked intermittently, and slipped forth its coils of clean white ticking, so flimsy and so portentous. From an inner office came the sound of a type-writer.

Mr. Creighton rose and shook hands with his visitor, then closed the door leading into the next room and resumed his seat by a big desk covered with correspondence. He had a smooth-shaven determined face that had once been very good-looking, but there were bags under the anxious eyes, and his cheeks were haggard and lined.

"He is a man of few words—probably because his wife is a woman of so many," thought the Duke. "I suppose I shall have to begin."

He was not a man of many words himself.

“I have come down here,” he said, “because it seems impossible to find you at your house, and it is necessary that I should speak to you on a matter that concerns us both. I came to America to ask your daughter to marry me.”

“Have you done so?”

“I have.”

“Has she accepted you?”

“Of course she wishes to refer the matter to you.”

“She wishes to marry you?”

“I think she does.”

Mr. Creighton sighed heavily. He wheeled about and looked through the window.

“I wish she could,” he said,—“if she loves you. I don’t know you. I haven’t had time to think about you. I should prefer that she married an American, myself, but I should never have crossed her

so long as she chose a gentleman and a man of honour. I know nothing of your record. Were the marriage possible, I should enquire into it. But I am afraid that it is not. ^fI am well aware—pardon my abruptness—that no Englishman of your rank comes to America for a wife if his income is sufficient to enable him to marry in his own country.” He paused a moment. Then he resumed. The effort was apparent. “I must ask your confidence for a time—but it is necessary to tell you that I am seriously involved; in short, if things don’t mend, and quickly, I shall go to pieces.”

The Duke was sitting forward, staring at the carpet, his chin pressed hard upon the head of his stick. “I am sorry,” he said, “very sorry.”

“So am I. Mabel has two hundred thousand dollars of her own. I have as much

more, something over, in land that is as yet unmortgaged; but that is not the amount you came for."

The Duke of Bosworth was traversing the most uncomfortable moments of his life. He opened his mouth twice to speak before he could frame a reply that should not insult his host and show himself the exponent of a type for which he suddenly experienced a profound disgust.

"Aire Castle," he said finally, "is half a ruin. All the land I have inherited which is not entailed is mortgaged to the hilt. I may add that I also inherited about half of the mortgages. My income is a pittance. It would cost two hundred thousand pounds to repair the castle—and until it is repaired, I have no home to offer a wife. In common justice to a woman, I must look out that she brings money with her. That is my position. It is a nasty one. It is good of you not to

call me a fortune-hunter and order me out."

"Well, well, at least you have not intimated that you are conferring an inestimable honour in asking me to regild your coronet. I appreciate your position. It is ugly. So is mine. Thank you for being frank."

The Englishman rose. He held out his hand. "I hope you'll come out all right," he said, with a sudden and rare burst of warmth. "I do indeed. Good luck to you."

Mr. Creighton shook his hand heartily. "Thank you. I won't. But I'm glad you feel that way."

He went with his guest to the outer door. The boy had disappeared. Mr. Creighton opened the door. The Duke was about to pass out. He turned back, hesitated a moment. "I shall go up and see your daughter

at once," he said. "Have I your permission to tell her what—what—you have told me?"

"Yes," said Mr. Creighton. "She must know sooner or later."

CHAPTER X.

THE Duke did not call a hansom when he reached the street. The interview to come was several times more trying to face than the last had been; he preferred to walk the miles between the Equitable Building and Murray Hill.

He reached the house in an hour. Miss Creighton was in the library reading a novel by the fire, and looked up brightly as he entered.

"You are a very bad man," she said, "I have waited in for you all day, and it is now half-past four. I am reading *Kenilworth*. The love scenes are too funny for words. Amy hangs upon Leicester's neck and exclaims 'My noble earl!' Fancy if I called you 'My noble duke.' How perfectly funny!"

The Duke took his stand on the hearth-rug—man's immemorial citadel of defence—and tapped his chin with his hat, regarding Mabel stolidly with his fishy pale-blue gaze. He was cross and uncomfortable and hated himself, but his face expressed nothing.

"I have seen your father," he said.

"Oh—have you? What—what did he say?"

"When I asked you to marry me I explained how I was situated."

"I know—won't papa?—He's very generous."

"He can't. He is very seriously embarrassed."

The girl's breath shortened painfully. She turned very white. Unconsciously she twisted her hands together.

"Then we cannot marry?"

"How can we? Do you want to spend your life hounded by lawyers, money-lenders,

and financial syndicates, and unable to keep up your position? You would die of misery, poor child. I am not a man to make a woman happy on three hundred thousand pounds a year. Poor! It would be hell."

She did not look up, but sat twirling her rings.

"You know best," she said, "I don't know the conditions of life in England. If you say that we should be miserable, you must know. I suppose you did not love me very much."

"Not much, Mabel. I have only the skeleton of a heart in me. I wonder it does duty at all. You are well rid of me."

"You certainly did not make any very violent protestations. I cannot accuse you of hypocrisy."

"One thing—I was not half good enough for you. As far as I can remember this is the first time I have ever humbled myself. You

are a jolly little thing and deserve better luck."

She made no reply.

"I shall cross almost immediately—shall give it out that you have refused me."

"You need not. I have told no one but Augusta. People will think that we are merely good friends. We will treat each other in a frank off-hand manner when we meet out."

"You are a game little thing! You'd make a good wife, a good fellow to chum with. I wish it could have come round our way."

He was quick of instinct, and divined that she wanted to be alone.

"*Au revoir*," he said. "We meet to-night at dinner, somewhere, don't we?"

"At the Burr's." She rose and held out her hand. She was very pale, but quite composed, and her flower-like face had the dig-

nity which self-respect so swiftly conceives and delivers. He had never been so near to loving her. She had bored him a good deal during the past weeks, but he suddenly saw possibilities in her. They were not great, but they would have meant something to him. He wanted to kiss her, but raised her hand to his lips instead, and went out.

Mabel waited until she heard the front door close, then ran up to her room and locked herself in:

"I mustn't cry," was her only thought for the moment.

"I mustn't—mustn't! My eyes are always swollen for four hours and my nose gets such a funny pink. I remember Augusta once quoted some poetry about it. I forget it."

She looked at the divan. It exerted a powerful magnetism. She saw herself lying face downward, sobbing. She caught hold of a chair to hold herself back. "I can't!" she

thought. "I can't! I must brace up for that dinner. The girls must never know. Oh! I wish I were dead! I wish I were dead!"

"I wish I were dead!" She said it aloud several times, thinking it might lighten the weight in her breast. But it did not. She looked at the clock and shuddered. "It is only five. What am I to do until Lena comes to dress me? She won't come until half-past six. I can't go to mamma; she would drive me distracted. Oh! I think I am going mad—but I *won't* make a fool of myself."

She walked up and down the room, clenching her hands until the nails bit the soft palms. "I read somewhere," she continued aloud, "that the clever people suffered most, that their nerves are more developed or something. I wonder what that must be like. Poor things! I am not clever, and I feel as if I'd dig my grave with my own fingers if I

could get into it. Oh! Am I going to cry? I won't. I'll think about something that will make me angry. Augusta. She'll get him now. She's wanted him from the first. I've seen it. She was honourable enough not to regularly try to cut me out, but there's nothing in the way now. And she will. I know she will. I hate her. I hate her. Oh, God! *What shall I do?*"

She heard the front door open; a moment later her father ascend the stair and enter his room. She ran across the hall, opened his door without ceremony and caught him about the neck, but still without tears.

He set his lips and held her close. Then he kissed and fondled her as he had not done for years. "Poor little girl," he said. "I am a terrible failure. God knows I should have been glad to have bought your happiness for you. As it is, I am afraid I have ruined it."

She noticed for the first time how worn and old he looked. Her development had been rapid during the last hour. She passed on to a new phase. "Poor papa," she said, putting her hands about his face. "It must be awful for you, and you have never told us. Listen. *He* said I would make a plucky wife, a good fellow. I'll take care of you and brace you up. I'll be everything to you, papa; indeed I will. Papa, you are not crying! Don't! I have to go out to dinner to-night! Listen. I don't care much. Indeed I don't. I'm sure I often wondered why he attracted me so much when I thought him over. Alex says that if he were an American she wouldn't take the trouble to reform him—that he isn't worth it. And Hal says he looks like a dough pudding, half baked. It's dreadful that we can't control our feelings better—Papa, give me every spare moment

.

you can, won't you? I can't stand the thought of the girls."

"Yes," he said, "every minute; and as soon as I can we'll go off somewhere together. It would be a great holiday for me. It is terrible for me to see you suffer, but I am selfish enough to be glad that I shall not lose you. Stay with me awhile. This will pass. You can't believe that now, but it will; and the next time you love, the man will be more worthy of you. I don't want to hurt you, my darling, but for the life of me, I can't think what you see in him."

CHAPTER XI.

THAT evening, shortly after Miss Forbes had been dressed for Mrs. Burr's dinner, her mother entered and dismissed the maid.

"What is it, mamma?" Augusta demanded in some surprise. "How odd you look. Not as pretty as usual."

Mrs. Forbes' lips had withdrawn from their pout; her whole face had lost its sensuousness and seemed to have settled into rigid lines. She went over to the fire and lifted one foot to the fender, then turned and looked at her daughter.

"Do you wish to marry the Duke of Bosworth?" she asked abruptly.

A wave of red rose slowly to Augusta's

hair. Her lips parted. "What do you mean?" she enquired after a moment. Her voice was a little thick. "He is engaged to Mabel."

"He cannot marry Mabel. Mr. Creighton is on the verge of ruin."

Miss Forbes gasped. "Oh, how dreadful!" she exclaimed, but something seemed to suffuse her brain with light.

"You can marry him if you wish."

"But Mabel is my most intimate friend. It would be like outbidding her. She has the two hundred thousand dollars that her grandmother left her, and her father could surely give her as much more."

"What would four hundred thousand dollars be to a ruined Duke, up to his ears in debt? He wants millions."

"But papa does not like him."

"Leave your father to me, and be guided entirely by me in this matter. I have a

plan mapped out if he will not give his consent at once. Do you wish to marry this man?"

Miss Forbes drew a hard breath. "I want to marry him more than anything in the world," she said.

CHAPTER XII.

ABOUT the same time, as the Duke of Bosworth was dressing for dinner in his rooms at The Waldorf, he received the following note:—

“DUKY, DUKY, DADDLEDUMS !—I have great news for you. Rush your engagements, and come here between twelve and one to-night. F. C.”

As the young Englishman entered Cuyler's rooms a little after midnight, he received such warmth of greeting from a powerful hand concealed behind the *portière* that his backbone doubled.

“For God's sake, Fletcher,” he said

crossly, "remember that I am not a Hercules. What do you want of me?"

"Sit down. Sit down. I'll put you in a good humour if I have to break a bank. I've pledged it to my peace of mind. Well, first—Creighton has practically gone to smash."

"I know it. He told me so this afternoon. Poor man, I felt sorry for him; and I think he did for me, although his respect may have been something less than his pity. I know I felt uncommonly cheap, and if he had kicked me out I doubt if I should have resented it. He said that what with his daughter's fortune and some land investments, he might scrape together a hundred thousand pounds. I told him it wouldn't pay my debts. Then I had an interview with her. Don't ask me to repeat it. Good God, what have we come to? Drop the subject."

"I haven't begun yet. My conscience wouldn't rest, however, unless I paused to remark that I am deuced sorry for the Creightons. They are the best sort, and I hate to see them go under. Well, to proceed. You can have Miss Forbes."

The nobleman's dull eyes opened. "What do you mean?"

"I had an interview of a purely diplomatic nature with *la belle mère* after I left you. She is willing. Miss Forbes is willing. Nay, willing is not the word. I named your price—the modest sum of \$5,000,000. She said you should have it."

"But Mr. Forbes despises me. By Heaven, I have more respect for that man than for anybody I have met in America. Every time I meet those steel eyes of his I seem to read: 'You poor, miserable, little wretch of a fortune-hunter! Go home and blow out your brains, but don't dis-

grace your name by bartering it for our screaming eagles.' He'll never consent."

"My boy, you need a B. and S. Do brace up." Fletcher wagged his head pathetically. "You'll have me crying in a minute. I've been on the verge of tears for the last three weeks. Now let me tell you that you are all right. There may be a tussle, but Forbes is bound to cave in the end. He is infatuated with his wife and she knows her power. She is as set on this match as you could be. She's had the bee in her bonnet for a good many years, to cut as great a dash in London as she does in New York. Of course she's in it in a way when she's over there for a month or two during the season, but she wants a long sight more than that. Her ancestry does her no good because the English trunk of the family died out two hundred years ago. As your mother-in-law

she'd be out of sight. A woman with her beauty and brain and style and charm could bring any society in the world to her feet, and keep it there once she had those feet planted beyond the door-mat. Now she is patronised pleasantly as one of many pretty American women who flit back and forth. You've got a powerful ally, and one that's bound to win. Now pull up that long face or I'll hold you under the cold water spout !”

“I believe you have put new life into me,” said his Grace, the Duke of Bosworth.

CHAPTER XIII.

AUGUSTA was moving restlessly about her boudoir. Her mind was uneasy and a trifle harrowed. For the first time in her life she was not thoroughly satisfied with herself. Once she sat down and opened "Progress and Poverty"; but George had ceased to charm, and she resumed her restless marching. Her boudoir was a scarlet confusion of silk and crêpe, and conducive to cheerfulness. Although it extinguished her drab colouring, Augusta usually felt her best in its glow and warmth; but to-day she felt her worst.

Suddenly she paused. There was a sound of rapid ascent of stair and familiar voices. She opened her door, and a moment later Mrs. Burr and Miss Maitland entered. Both looked

unusually grave, and slightly pugnacious. Augusta experienced a disagreeable sensation in her knees.

"Has anything happened?" she asked, after she had greeted them and they were seated.

"Augusta!" said Miss Maitland sternly, "we are perhaps meddling in what is none of our affair; nevertheless, we have made up our minds to speak."

"Well?"

"Are you trying to get the Duke of Bosworth away from Mabel Creighton?"

"I am not."

"It looks like it."

"Does it?"

"You are keeping something back, Augusta," said Mrs. Burr. "Out with it."

Miss Forbes recovered herself. "I am going to marry the Duke of Bosworth," she said distinctly.

“Augusta Forbes!”

“Yes; and I have not cut out Mabel Creighton. I am perfectly willing to justify myself to you, as we have always kept to our compact to stand the truth from each other. He came over here to marry Mabel, but Mr. Creighton could not give him the portion—dot—you know. He is dreadfully embarrassed, *but that is a dead secret.*”

“And you have out-bid her?”

“I have done nothing of the sort. The thing was quite settled before the Duke spoke to me.”

“He didn’t lose much time. He must have been pretty sure how he would be received before he wound up with Mabel.”

“I did not discuss that part of it with him.”

“It’s too bad you didn’t discuss less. Poor Mabel is a wreck. The way she is trying to keep up is positively pathetic.”

“Well, my not marrying him would not help her.”

“Augusta, you are wood all through.”

The young matron threw herself back in her chair, and beat her knuckles sharply with her lorgnette. Miss Maitland, who had not spoken for some moments, now unburdened herself.

“I have a good deal to say, Augusta, and I am going to say it. You know we all agreed before we came out that we would regard certain matters in a different light from that of most fashionable girls; we agreed, among other things, that, while enjoying all that our wealth and position offered us, we would read, and think, and endeavour to be of some use in the world—not write polemical novels, or belong to clubs, or anything of that sort, but take the very best advantages of the accident of our birth. And we also agreed—do you remember?—that we would cultivate higher

ideals than most women care for—particularly in our relations to each other and to men. It is three years since that subject was discussed; but you remember it, I suppose.”

“I do, and I have not broken it.”

“Very well, I shall say no more about that particular phase of the matter; that is for you to settle with your own conscience, and with Mabel. This is what we are chiefly concerned with: there are several ways by which our example can benefit society, and the chief of them is to stop marrying impecunious foreign nobles!”

She paused a moment. Augusta stiffened up, but made no reply. Miss Maitland resumed:

“As long as we continue to jump at titles whenever they come gold-hunting and Jew-flying, just so long shall we—the upper class of the United States, which should be its best—be contemptible in the eyes of the world.

Just so long shall we be sneered at in the newspapers, lampooned in novels, excoriated by serious outsiders, and occupy an entirely false place in contemporary history. We are so conspicuous, that everything we do is tittle-tattled in the Press—we are such a god-send to them that it is a thousand pities we don't give them something worth writing about. Now, my idea is this: that all we New York girls band together and vow not to marry any foreigner of title, English or otherwise, unless he can cap our prospective inheritance by twice the amount—which is equivalent to vowing that we will go untitled to our graves. Also, that such girls as we fail to convert from this nonsensical snobbery, and who insist upon marrying titles whenever they can get them, will see none of us at their weddings.

“Now this is the point: That would not only express to the whole world our contempt

for the alliance of the fortune-hunter and the snob, but it would raise the self-esteem of our own men, and be one step toward making them better than they are. You couldn't convince one of them that we are not all watching the foreign horizon with spy-glasses, waiting to make a break for the first title that appears, and that they have not got to be content with the leavings.] But if they saw that we really desired to marry Americans, and, above all, men that we could love and respect, I believe they would make an effort to be worthy of us. That would certainly be one great step gained. The next thing for us to do is to be able to love hard enough to awaken the right kind of love in men."

"Well?" asked Augusta.

Miss Maitland's cheeks were flushed. She looked almost beautiful. Augusta felt that she looked pasty, but did not care. She was angry, but determined to control herself.

“You have a great opportunity. Dismiss the Duke of Bosworth, and avow openly that you will only marry an American—that the American at his best is your ideal. How it can be otherwise, as the daughter of your father, passes my comprehension. Will you?”

“Bravo, Alexis!” said Mrs. Burr. “We’ll have to find a man who’s hunting for an ideal woman. And you didn’t mention Socialism once.”

“That belongs to the future. I have come to the conclusion that we must build the house before we can fresco the walls.”

Augusta had risen, and was walking up and down the room. At the end of three or four minutes she paused and faced her visitors, looking down upon them with her habitual calm, slightly accentuated.

“A month ago I should have agreed with you,” she said. “Your ideas, Alex,

are always splendid, and, usually, no one is more willing to adopt them than I. But theories sometimes collide with facts. I am going to marry the Duke of Bosworth."

They rose.

"I hope you'll scratch each other's eyes out!" said Mrs. Burr.

"You married for money," retorted Augusta.

"I did, and my reasons were good ones, as you know. Moreover, I married a man, and an American. If I hadn't liked him, and if he'd looked as if he'd been boiled for soup, I wouldn't have looked at him if he'd owned Colorado. Latimer's wings are not sprouting, and he doesn't take kindly to the idea of being reformed, but I don't regret having married him—not for a minute. You will. Maybe you won't though."

Miss Maitland had fastened her coat. She gave her muff a little shake.

“Good-bye, Augusta,” she said icily. “It is too bad that you inherited nothing from your father but his iron will.”

And without shaking hands they went out.

CHAPTER XIV.

BUT although Augusta had maintained an attitude of stiff defiance, she was by no means pleased with herself. She rang for her maid, dressed for the street, and a few moments later was on her way to Murray Hill. When she reached the Creighton's she went directly up to Mabel's room, and, after a hasty tap, entered. Mabel was lying full-length on the divan among her rainbow pillows, a silver bottle of smelling-salts at her nose.

She rose at once.

"I have a headache," she said coldly.
"Sit down."

"Mabel!" said Augusta precipitately,
"should you think me dishonourable if I married the Duke of Bosworth?"

“If I did would it make any difference?”

“No; but I’d rather you didn’t.”

Mabel turned her head away and looked into the logs burning on the hearth.

“Until you yourself told me that it was over,” pursued Augusta, “I gave him no sort of encouragement; but as you cannot marry him yourself, I don’t see why I shouldn’t.”

“No; I suppose there is no reason why you shouldn’t. Only it is something I couldn’t do myself.”

“You don’t know whether you could or not. Nobody knows what abstract sentiments he’ll sacrifice when he wants a thing badly. If somebody suddenly died and left you a fortune, wouldn’t you take him from me if you could?”

“Yes, I would.”

“Well, that would be much more dishonourable than anything I have done.”

"I suppose so. I don't care. I don't call that kind of thing honour. I wouldn't have done it in the first place."

"I fail to see any distinction, Mabel. You never had any reasoning faculty. I am much more suited to the Duke, anyhow, for he is really clever."

"It isn't cleverness he's after."

"Oh, of course he must have money. One is used to that. It's like knowing that lots of people come to your house because you give good dinners; but you don't like them any the less; in fact, don't think about it. We have to take the world as we find it. If you regard the Duke as a fortune-hunter I wonder you can still love him."

Mabel turned her head and regarded Miss Forbes with a haughty stare. "I do not love him," she said, "I despise him too thoroughly. It is my pride only that is

irritated. Don't let there be any doubt on that point."

"Well, I am delighted—relieved! It has worried me, made me genuinely unhappy; it has indeed, Mabel dear. I will admit that I had misgivings, that I was not altogether satisfied with myself; but now I can be as happy as ever again. And you don't think it dishonourable? Please say that."

"No, I don't think it dishonourable; (for we are no longer friends)," she added to herself; but she was too generous to say it aloud.

Augusta went away a few minutes later, and Mabel, who was not going out that evening, flung herself on the divan, and sobbed into her cushions.

CHAPTER XV.

SEVERAL evenings later, a banquet was given to a party of Russian notables. As no young people were invited, Augusta, chaperoned by her father's sister, Mrs. Van Rhuys, arranged a theatre party, which included the English Duke.

As Mrs. Forbes stood between her mirrors that evening, she wondered if she had ever looked more lovely. She wore a gown of ivory white satin, so thick that it creaked, and entirely without trimming, save for the lace on the bust. But about the waist, one end hanging almost to the hem of the gown was a ribbon of large pigeon-blood rubies. A collar of the same gems lay at the base of her long round

throat. Above her brow blazed a great star, the points set with diamonds, radiating from a massive ruby. A smaller star clasped the lace at her breast. The bracelets on her arms, the rings on her fingers, sparkled pink and white.

Her lips parted slightly. She thrilled with triumph, intoxicated with her beauty and magnificence. For this woman could never become *blasé*, never cease to be vital, until the shroud claimed her.

Nevertheless, she felt unaccountably nervous. She had felt so all day.

“I am quite well, am I not, mammy?” she said to an old negro woman who sat regarding her with rapt admiration. The negress had been Virginia’s nurse and personal attendant for thirty-nine years. Only the ocean—for which she had an unsurmountable horror—had separated them. In Augusta she had never taken the slightest

interest, but over her idolized mistress she exercised an austere vigilance. And as she was a good old-fashioned doctor, and understood Mrs. Forbes' constitution as had it been a diagram of straight lines, she was always on the alert to checkmate nature, and rarely unsuccessful.

"You sut'n'y is, honey," she replied. "You never was pearter. No wonder you git 'cited sometimes with all dose purty things that cos' such heaps and heaps o' money. Yo' uster go wild over yore toys, and you al'ays will be de same."

It was not yet eight and Mrs. Forbes seated herself lightly on the old woman's knee. At that moment Augusta entered the room.

"Mother!", she exclaimed in a disgusted voice. "Do get up. I declare you are nothing but a big overgrown baby. If it isn't papa it's mammy, and if it isn't mammy it's papa."

"I suppose you can get through life without coddling," replied her mother, undisturbed; "but I can't. You look remarkably well this evening."

"Thanks." Miss Forbes regarded herself complacently in the mirror. She wore black and pink and there was colour in her face. "I'm no beauty, but I think I do look rather well, and this frock is certainly a stunning fit. You are a vision as usual. There is the carriage."

Mrs. Forbes rose and the maid enveloped her in a long mantle of white velvet lined with ermine. The old negress adjusted the inner flap over the chest and wrapped a lace scarf about the softly-dressed hair.

"You is a leetle nervous, honey," she said. "Has anything put yo' out? Don't you tetch one bit o' sweets to-night and not a drap o' coffee."

"I'll have it out when we come home, and

get it over," thought Mrs. Forbes as she went down the stair and smiled to her husband, who awaited her in the hall below. "That is what is making me so nervous."

Mr. Forbes, like many New York millionaires, had spread his house over all the land he could buy in one spot on The Avenue, and there was no *porte cochère*. When his wife was obliged to go out in stormy weather an awning was erected between the front doors and the curb-stone. To-night it was snowing heavily. As she appeared on the stair two men-servants opened the doors and flung a carpet from the threshold to the carriage-step. If Virginia Forbes had ever wet her boots or slippers she could not recall the occasion.

She was the sensation of the dinner and of the reception afterward. The foreigners stood about her in a rivetted cluster, and with the extravagance of their kind assured her that there was no woman in Europe at once so

beautiful and so clever. She took their flatteries for what they were worth; they could have salaamed before her without turning her head; but she revelled in the adulation, nevertheless.

Mr. Forbes had two important letters to write when they returned home, and she went with him to the library. As he took the chair before his desk she got him a fresh pen, then poured him some whisky from the decanter. She was as fresh as when she had left the house, and he looked at her with passionate admiration.

"I should like to be able to tell you how proud I was of you to-night," he said. "Sometimes I believe that you are really the most splendid creature on earth."

"That is what those prancelings were telling me," she said, rumpling his hair. "But you flatter me much more, for I may suspect that you mean it."

“Well, sit where I can’t see you or I sha’n’t do much writing. Don’t go, though.”

She took an easy chair by the fire, but although she lay in its depths and put her little feet on a low pouf, she drew the long rope of jewels nervously through her fingers. Once or twice her breath came short, and then she clasped the rubies so closely that the setting dented her skin.

“I must, must brace up,” she thought. “Unless I am at my best I shall be no match for him, and I must win in the first round or it will be a long hard fight that I may not be equal to. Besides, I should hate it.”

She was glad to have the interview in the library, her husband’s favourite room. It was a long narrow room, lined to the ceiling with the books of seven generations: Mr. Forbes came of a line of men that had been noted for mental activity in one wise or another since England had civilized America. There were

busts and bas-reliefs of great men, and many pieces of old carved furniture. The curtains, carpet, and easy chairs were lit with red, and very luxurious. The mantel was of black onyx. Above it was a portrait of Mrs. Forbes by Sargeant. The great artist protested that he had interpreted "the very sky and sea-line of her soul." Certain it is that he had chosen to see only that which was noble and alluring. Imperious pride was in the poise of the head, the curve of the short upper lip; but it was the unself-conscious pride of race and the *autorité* of a lovely woman which all men delighted to foster. The eyes, sensuous, tender, expectant, were the eyes of a woman who had loved one man only, and that man with fond reiteration. The lower lip was full, the mouth slightly parted. The brow was so clear that it seemed to shed radiance. It uplifted the face, as if the soul dwelt there, at home with the vigorous brain.

Some thin white stuff was folded closely over the small low bust. A string of large pearls was wound in and out of the heavy hair, whose living warmth the artist had not failed to transfer. Indeed, warmth, life, passion, soul, intelligence seemed to emanate from this wonderful portrait, so combined by the limner as to convey an impression of modern womanhood perfected, satisfied, triumphant, to which the world could give no more, and from which the passing years would hesitate to steal aught. Sometimes Virginia Forbes stood and regarded it sadly. "It is an ideal me," she would think, "all that I should like to be—that I might—were it not for this trowelful of clay in my soul." Although Mr. Forbes was too keen a student of human nature to be ignorant of his wife's faults, his faith was so strong in the large full side of her nature that he had long since felt justified in

closing his eyes to all that fell below the ideal.

He wrote for an hour, then threw the pen down, rose, and ran his fingers through his hair.

"Thank heaven that is over. I can sleep in peace. How good of you to wait for me. Are you very tired?"

"No," she said, and unconsciously her lips lost their fulness, and she clutched the stones so tightly that they bruised her flesh. "Will you sit down, Ned, dear? I want to talk to you."

"Is anything the matter?" he asked anxiously. "You've lost your colour since you came in. I am afraid you go too hard. New York is a killing place. Shall we go to Asheville for a week or two?"

"I never felt better. Sit down—there—where I can see you; and light a cigar. I am going to speak of something very important.

You won't like what I say—at first; but I am sure you will when I have finished."

He sat down, much puzzled. "I don't want to smoke, and I'm afraid something has gone wrong with you. Have you been investing and lost? You know that I never ask what you do with your money, and if you are short all you have to do is to ask for more."

"You know that I never would invest money without your advice; and I have scarcely touched this year's income. It is about Augusta."

Mr. Forbes raised his brows. "Augusta? She doesn't want to take to the public platform, I hope."

"She is in love."

"What? Our calm, superior—with whom, for heaven's sake?"

"With the Duke of Bosworth."

Mr. Forbes sat forward in his chair, press-

ing his hands upon its arms. The blood rose slowly and covered his face. "The Duke of Bosworth!" he ejaculated. "Do you mean to tell me that our daughter, and a girl who is American to her finger-tips, has had her head turned by a title?"

"It is not the title, Ned; it is the man——"

"Impossible! The man? Why, he's not a man. He's—but I don't choose to express to you or to any woman what I think of him. I never set up to be a saint; I went the pace with other men before I married you; but ⁱⁿ my opinion the best thing that remnants like Bosworth can do is to get into the family vault as quickly as possible and leave no second edition behind them. _{He'll} leave none of my blood."

"You misjudge him, dear; I am sure you do. I have talked much with him. He is very intelligent, and, I think, would

be glad to live his life over. It is his delicate physique that gives him the appearance of a wreck."

"Excuse me. I have seen men of delicate physique all my life. I am also a man of the world. Sooner than have that puny demoralised creature the father of my grandchildren, I should gladly see Augusta spend her life alone—happy as we have been. I cannot understand it. She must be hypnotised. And you, Virginia! I am ashamed of you. I cannot believe that you have encouraged her. You, the cleverest and most sensible woman I have ever known! Do you wish to see your daughter the wife of that man?"

"I should not if she were like some girls. But she has little sentiment and ideality. She is a strong masculine character, just the type to give new life and stamina to the decaying houses of the old world. She

is not as clever as she thinks, but at thirty she will know her limitations and be a very level-headed well-balanced woman. She will shed no tears over the Duke's defections, and you know what Darwin says about the children of strong mothers and dissipated eldest sons. I am sure that Augusta's children will not disgrace you."

"What you say sounds well: I never yet knew you to fail to make out a good case when driven to a corner; but this miserable man's children will not be my grandchildren."

"Ned, you are so prejudiced. You are such a rampant American."

"I am, I hope. And you know perfectly well that I am not prejudiced. I know many members of the British peerage for whom I have hearty liking and respect. Some of the best brains the world has

ever known have belonged to the English aristocracy. But this whelp—if he were the son of as good an American as I am do you think it would make any difference? And if he were worthy of his blood he could have my daughter and welcome.”

Mrs. Forbes had controlled herself inflexibly, but she was conscious of increasing excitement. Her eyes looked as hard and brilliant as the jewels upon her. Her hands trembled as she played with her rope of rubies. She recognised that he was conclusive; that it would be worse than folly to resort to endearment and cajolery, even could she bring herself to the mood. But before such uncompromising opposition her ambition cemented and controlled her, was near to torching reason and judgment. She would not trust herself to speak for a moment, but looked fixedly at her husband.

"I thought this little fortune-hunter was engaged to Mabel Creighton," he said abruptly.

"That was all a mistake——"

"He found out that Creighton was in a hole, I suppose. Virginia!—it is not possible?—you did not tell him?—you have not been scheming to bring about this damnable transaction?"

"Of course I did not tell him. I wish you wouldn't screw up your eyes like that at me. I saw before he had been here a week that he had fallen in love with Augusta——"

"Love be damned! Do you imagine a man like that loves?"

"Well, liked then. Of course he cannot afford to marry without money——"

"And I am expected to buy him, I suppose?"

"Don't be so coarse! Now listen to me,

Ned. I want this match. Of course I should not move in the matter if I did not respect the Duke, and if Augusta didn't love him as much as she is capable of loving. But I want this English alliance—and there may never be another opportunity. I will state the fact plainly—it would give me the greatest possible satisfaction to know that my position was as assured in England as it is in America——”

“Good God! What is the matter with you American women? If you sat down and worked it out, could you tell why you are all so mad about the English nobility? Or wouldn't you blush if you could? As I said the other day it is a germ disease—a species of brain-poisoning. It eats and rots. It demoralises like morphine and alcohol. After a woman has once let herself go, she is good for nothing else for the rest of her life. She eats,

drinks, sleeps, thinks English aristocracy. Even you, if I gave you your head, would find it in you to become a veritable coronet-chaser—you!—my God! Well, it won't be in my time; and if Augusta runs off with this debased dishonoured little wretch she'll not get one cent of mine. And there will be no breaking of wills; I'll dispose of my fortune before I die. I shall take good care to let him know this at once, for I make no doubt he's desperate——”

Mrs. Forbes sprang to her feet. “You never spoke so to me before,” she cried furiously. “I do not believe you love me. So long as I spend my life studying your wishes—and I have studied them for twenty-two years—you are amiable and charming enough; but now that your wife and daughter want something that you don't wish to give them, that doesn't happen to suit

your fancy, you turn upon me in your true character of a tyrant——”

“Virginia! hush!” said Mr. Forbes sternly. “I have done nothing of the sort. You are talking like a petulant child. Come here and tell me that you will think no more of this wretched business——”

He went forward, but she moved rapidly aside.

“Don’t touch me,” she said. “I am not in the mood to be touched. And I shall never be happy again if you refuse your consent to this marriage.”

“Never be what? Has our happiness rested on so uncertain a foundation as that? I thought that you loved me.”

“Oh, I do. Of course I do. But can’t you understand that love isn’t everything to a woman?—any more than it is to a man? I would be married to no other man on earth, not to a prince of the

blood. But it is not everything to me any more than it is everything to you. Suppose you were suddenly stripped of your tremendous political influence, of your financial power, and reduced to the mere domestic and social round? Would I suffice? Not unless you were eighty and in need of a nurse."

She had drawn herself up to her full commanding height. Her head was thrown back, her nostrils were distended, her lips were a scarlet undulating line. There was no other colour in her face. It looked as opaque, as hard as ivory. The eyes were merciless; even their brown had lost its warmth. The jewels with which she was hung, which glowed with deep rubescent fire on her robe and neck and brow, gave her the appearance of an idol—an idol which had suddenly been informed with the spirit of pitiless ambition and spurned its creator.

Mr. Forbes had turned very grey. His nostrils and lips contracted. His teeth set. Involuntarily he glanced from the woman to the portrait. The portrait was more alive than the woman.

“Don’t you understand?” she demanded.

“No,” he said, “I don’t think I do. At least I hope I do not. At all events, I hope we may not discuss this subject again. I did not tell you that I intend to pull Creighton through. I cannot see an old friend go under. It will be to the Duke’s interest to push his suit in that quarter—if they want him. Now, please go to your room. You are very much excited. If you were not I hardly think you would have spoken as you have.”

He went to the end of the room and opened the door. She passed him quickly with averted head.

CHAPTER XVI.

ONCE more father and daughter faced each other across the breakfast table. This time, Augusta, with a very red face, stared defiantly into bitter and contemptuous eyes.

“And your socialism? Do you expect to convert your Duke?”

“No, papa; of course not.”

“It is exactly five weeks since you informed me that you wished me to devote my fortune to the dear people.”

“I know it, papa. One looks at things very differently when one looks at them through a man's eyes, as it were—I mean through the eyes of the man one has fallen in love with; of course I always have had the highest respect for your opinion. Now, it

seems to me a grand thing to restore the fortunes of an ancient and illustrious house——”

“That is the reason the good God permitted me to be born, I suppose—to sacrifice some ten or fifteen years of man’s allotted span in accumulating millions with which to prop up a rotten aristocracy.”

“Papa! I never knew you to be so bitter. You are quite unlike yourself this morning. Of course, we don’t all look at things in the same way in this world. But I don’t wish you to think that I have entirely forsaken my old principles. I should do much good with my money in England. The poverty is said to be frightful there; and I hear that the working-men on the great estates only get a pound a week, and sometimes less. I should pay those on our estates more, my self.”

“It doesn’t occur to you, I suppose, that

American-made millions should be spent in America, and that we have poverty enough of our own."

"Our poor are mostly Europeans," she retorted quickly.

He gave a brief laugh. "You have me there. Well; go on. You intend to reform this poor little trembling sore-eyed weak-kneed, debauchee——"

"Father! I will not permit you to speak in that way of the Duke of Bosworth."

She had sprung from her chair. Like all phlegmatic natures, when the depths were stirred she was violent and ugly. She looked as if about to leap upon her parent and beat him.

He rose also and looked down on her. "You will not do what?" he said with a cutting contempt. "Go upstairs to your room, and stay there until I give you permission to leave it. And understand here, once for

all, that not one dollar of mine will ever go into that man's pocket. If he marries you, he will have to support you, or you him: I shall not take the trouble to enquire which."

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. FORBES was obliged to go that morning to Boston, to remain until the following evening. He did not see his wife before he left—had not seen her since the interview in the library. She had locked herself in her room, and he was not the man to hammer on a sulking woman's door.

Several men he knew were in his car, and he talked with them until the train reached Boston. There he was engrossed; he had barely time to snatch a few hours for sleep, none for thought. But the next day, after taking his chair in the train for New York, and observing that he knew no one in the car, he became aware that the heart within him was heavy. He and his wife had quar-

relled before, for she had a hot Southern temper, and he was by no means without gunpowder of his own; but none of their disputes had left behind it the flavour of this. That she should tolerate such a man as Bosworth, had disappointed him; that she should espouse his pretensions to their only child, filled him with disgust and something like terror; and her snobbery sickened him. But what had stabbed into the quick of his heart were her final words. He repeated them again and again, hoping to dull their edge.

Moreover, she had never let the night set its ugly seal on their quarrels. Her tempers were soon over, and she had invariably come to him and commanded or coaxed for reconciliation, as her mood dictated. He had steered safely through the first trying years of matrimony, and it appalled him to think that perhaps an unreckoned future lay before them both.

When he entered his house something struck him as out of the common. A servant had fetched his portmanteau from the cab. It suddenly occurred to Mr. Forbes that the man had ostentatiously evaded his eye.

He walked toward the stair, hesitated, then turned.

"Is Mrs. Forbes well?" he asked; and he found that he was making an effort to control his voice.

The man flushed and hung his head. "Mrs. Forbes and Miss Augusta sailed for Europe this afternoon, sir. There's a letter for you on the mantel-piece in the library."

Mr. Forbes did not trust himself to say, "Ah!" As he turned the knob of the library door his hand trembled. He entered, and locked the door behind him.

He opened the letter at once and read it.

"I think you did not understand on Mon-

day night that I was in earnest," it ran. "I am so much in earnest that I shall not stay here to bicker with you. That we have never done. I do not wish to run the risk of speaking again as I spoke the last time we were together. I know that I hurt you, and I am very sorry. If I did not believe that you were entirely wrong in the stand you have taken, I should not think of taking any decisive step in the matter myself; for it hurts me to hurt you—please believe that. But I feel sure that as soon as you are alone and think it over calmly, you will see that your opposition is hardly warrantable, and that the wishes of your wife and daughter are worthy of serious consideration. If we remained to renew the subject constantly you would not give it this consideration; there would be an undignified and regrettable war of words every day.

"This is what I have made up my mind to do: if you persist in refusing your consent—

which I cannot believe—I shall, on the tenth day of March, turn over all my own property to the Duke: my houses in Newport and Asheville, my horses and yacht, and my jewels. Two days later they will marry. I stand pledged to these two people that they shall marry, and nothing will induce me to break my word.

“I sail to-day with Augusta on the *Brétagne*; I go to Paris first to order the trousseau. My address will be the ‘Bristol’; but I shall only be in Paris a week. From there I shall go to London—to the ‘Bristol.’ The Duke and Fletcher Cuyler sail to-day on the *Majestic*.

“I am afraid I have expressed myself brutally. My head aches. I am very nervous. I can hardly get my thoughts together, with all this hurry and confusion, and the unhappy knowledge that I am displeasing you. But this cloud that has fallen between us can be

brushed aside; we can be happy again, and at once. It only rests with you.

“VIRGINIA.

“I have told Harriet to make a plausible explanation of our abrupt departure. She has a talent for that sort of thing. No one need know that there has been the slightest difference of opinion.”

Mr. Forbes dropped the letter to the floor, and leaned forward, his elbows digging into his knees, his hands pressed to his head.

He stared at the carpet. His face was as white as if someone had struck him a blow in a vital part. The tears gathered slowly in his eyes and rolled over his cheeks. Suddenly his hands covered his face; and sobs shook him from head to foot.

“What have I loved?” he thought.
“What have I loved? Have I been in a

fool's paradise for twenty-two years? Oh, my God!"

This woman had been the pre-eminent consideration of the best years of his life. He had loved her supremely. He had been faithful to her. He had poured millions at her feet, delighted to gratify her love of splendour and power. And never had a man seemed more justified. She had half lived in his arms. She had been his comrade and friend, a source of sympathy and repose and diversion and happiness that had never failed him; for nearly a quarter of a century. And now she had sold him, trodden in the dirt his will, his pride, his heart, that she might finger a coronet which could never be hers, but gloat over the tarnish on her fingers.

He sat there for many hours. Dinner was announced, but he paid no heed. He reviewed his married life. It had seemed

to him very nearly perfect. It lost nothing in the retrospect. He doubted if many men were as happy as he had been, if many women had as much to give to a man as Virginia Forbes. And now it had come to a full stop; to be resumed, pitted and truncated, in another chapter. The delight of being petted and spoiled and adored by a man whom all men respected, the love and communion upon which she had seemed passionately dependent, were chaff in the scale against her personal and social vanities.

Life had been very kind to him. Money, position, influential friends had been his birthright. His talents had been recognised in his early manhood. He had turned his original thousands into millions. No man in the United States stood higher in the public estimation, nor could have had a wider popularity, had he chosen to send

his magnetism to the people. No American was more hospitably received abroad. Probably no man living was the object of more kindly envy. And yet he sat alone in his magnificent house and asked himself, "For what were mortals born?" His heart ached so that he could have torn it out and trampled on it. And the gall that bit the raw wound was the knowledge that he must go on loving this woman so long as life was in him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MRS. FORBES and her daughter had been in London two weeks. The engagement had been announced by the Duke a week previously, and was the sensation of the hour. The American newspapers were agog, but, as Mr. Forbes refused to be interviewed, were obliged to content themselves with daily bulletins from London. Mr. Forbes' opposition was suspected, but could not be verified. When congratulated, he replied diplomatically that he was not a warm advocate of international marriages. He hedged with a sense of bitter abasement, but he could not fling his dignity into the public maw.

Mrs. Van Rhuys informed people that,

personally, her brother liked the Duke of Bosworth, but had hoped that Augusta would marry an American. She could not name the exact amount of the dowry; several millions, probably. The Duke seemed singularly indifferent. He wished the marriage to take place at once and in England, that his mother, who idolized him, might be present. Wherefore the sudden move, as the trousseau was of far more importance than the breaking of a dozen social engagements. Mr. Forbes would go over for the wedding, of course—unless this dreadful financial muddle prevented. She and her brother-in-law, Schuyler Van Rhuys, who was nursing the wound inflicted by that unintelligible Californian, Helena Belmont, should go, in any case. No; the Duke had not jilted Mabel Creighton. On the contrary, Mabel might be said to have made the match. She and

the Duke had known each other for a long while, and were the best of friends, nothing more.

All the folk in London of the Duke's set had called on Mrs. Forbes and the impending Duchess. As Parliament was sitting, there was a goodly number of them. The United States Ambassador gave a banquet in honour of the engagement, and it was the first of many attentions.

But the Duke was a man in whom few beyond his intimate circle took personal interest: he was cold, repellent, unpicturesque. The heiress had neither beauty nor the thistle-down attraction of the average American girl. It was Virginia Forbes who introduced a singular variation into this important but hackneyed transaction, and atoned for the paucities of the principal figures: she absorbed something more than two-thirds of the public attention. Her

beauty, her distinction, her lively wit, her exquisite taste in dress, her jewels, above all her girlish appearance, commanded the reluctant admiration or the subtle envy of the women, the enthusiasm of the men, and the unflagging attentions of the weekly press. Her ancestry was suddenly discovered, and was a mine of glittering and illimited strata. Her photograph was printed in every paper which aimed to amuse a great and weary people, and was on sale in the shops. In short, she was the "news" of the hour; and the twentieth of his line and the lady who would save the entail were the mere mechanism selected by Circumstance to steer a charming woman to her regalities.

"You certainly ought to be in a state of unleavened bliss," remarked her daughter with some sarcasm one evening as they sat together after tea, alone for the hour.

“You simply laid your plans, sailed over, and down went London. I never knew anything quite so neat in my life. But it is in some people’s lines to get everything they want, and I suppose you will to the end of the chapter.”

Mrs. Forbes was gazing into the fire through the sticks of a fan. Her face was without its usual colour and her lips were contracted.

“Not a line from your father, and it is three weeks,” she said abruptly.

“You did not expect *him*—father!—to come round in a whirl, I suppose. But why do you worry so? You know that it can end in one way only. We are all he has, and he adores us, and cannot live without us. It isn’t as if he were fast, like so many New York men. I have not worried—not for a moment.”

“How can you be so cold-blooded? I

wish you knew the wretch I feel. If he does adore us, cannot you comprehend what we are making him suffer? Sometimes I think I can never make it up to him, not with all the devotion I am capable of, after this miserable business is over."

"Mother! You are not weakening? You will not retreat now that you have gone so far?"

"I have no intention of retreating. But I wish that I had stayed in New York and fought it out there. It was a shocking and heartless thing to run away and leave him like that, a brutal and insulting thing; but when he told me that he should pull Mr. Creighton through, and speak to the Duke, this move seemed the only one that could save the game."

"And a very wise one it was. Father would have beaten you in the end—surely; he can do anything with you. I think it is

humiliating to be part and parcel of a man like that."

"You know nothing of love. You are fascinated by a man who has the magnetism of indifference; that is all."

"I am quite sure that I love Bertie," said Miss Forbes with decision. "I have analyzed myself thoroughly, and I feel convinced that it is love—although I thank my stars that I could never in any circumstances be so besottedly in love with a man as you are with dear papa. I do not pretend to deny that I am pleased, very pleased, at the idea of being a Duchess. All we American girls of the best families have good blue English blood in our veins, and it seems to me that in accepting the best that the mother country can offer us, we should feel no more flattered or excited than any English-born girl in the same circumstances. For the *nouveau riche*—the fungi—of course it is ridiculous, and also lamentable:

they muddy a pure stream, and they are chromos in a jewelled frame. [^] But there are many of us that should feel a certain gratitude to Providence that we are permitted to save from ruin the grand old families whose ancestors and ours played together, perhaps, as children. To me it is a sacred duty as well as a very great pleasure. _^ Papa's English ancestors may not have been as smart as yours, but he has seven generations of education and refinement, position and wealth behind him in the United States; he is the chief figure in the aristocracy of the United States; and in time he must see things as we do."

To this edifying homily Mrs. Forbes gave scant attention. She was tormented with conjectures of her husband's scorn and displeasure, picturing his loneliness. Sometimes she awoke suddenly in the night, lost the drift for the moment of conversation in company, saw a blank wall instead of the *mise en*

scène of the play, her brain flaring with the enigma: "Will life ever be quite the same again?" She had had a second object in leaving New York abruptly: she believed that her husband could not stand the test of her absence and anger. But in the excitement and rush of those two days she had not looked into her deeper knowledge of him. She had known him very well. It was a dangerous experiment to wound a great nature, to shatter the delicate partition between illusion and an analytical mind.

"What a dreadful sigh!" expostulated Miss Forbes. "It is bad for the heart to sigh like that. I don't think you are very well. I don't think, lovely as you look, that you have been quite up to mark since we left New York."

"I suppose it is because I was ill crossing; I never was before, you know. And then it is the first time in my life that I have been

away from both your father and mammy. I am so used to being taken care of that I feel as if I were doing the wrong thing all the time, and Marie is merely a toilette automaton. This morning the clothes were half off the bed when I woke up, and the window was open; and yesterday Marie gave me the wrong wrap, and I was cold all the afternoon."

"Good heavens, mother!" cried Miss Forbes. "Fancy being thirty-nine and such a baby. I feel years older than you."

"And immeasurably superior. I suppose the petting and care I have had all my life would bore you. Well, your cold independent nature often makes me wonder what are its demands upon happiness. Does Bertie ever kiss you?"

"Occasionally; but I don't care much about kissing. We discuss the questions of the day."

"Poor man!"

“I am sure that he likes it, and we shall get along admirably. I am the stronger nature, and I feel reasonably certain that I shall acquire great influence over him, and make an exemplary man of him.”

“Great heavens!” thought Mrs. Forbes. “A plain passionless pseudo-intellectual girl reforming an English profligate! What a sight for the gods!”

“I hope papa will come round before the wedding, because I wish only the interest of my dowry settled on us, and it takes a man to hold out on that point. That would give me the upper hand in a way. You have not written to him since we left, have you?”

“No.”

“Don’t you think it is time?”

“I intend to write by to-morrow’s steamer.”

“Do make him really understand that he

is forcing you to sacrifice the houses and jewels to which you are so much attached."

"I shall make it as strong as I can."

"I'll write to Aunt Harriet, and tell her to talk to him. Poor dear papa, I am afraid he is lonesome. I wish he would come over so that we could all be together again. Give him my love and a kiss."

"You certainly have a magnificent sense of humour."

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. FORBES read his wife's second letter with dry eyes. His face, during the past weeks, had been habitually hard and severe. He looked older. It was a long letter. It was fragrant with love and admitted remorse; but it reasserted that unless he made the required settlement three weeks from receipt she would hand over to the Duke's attorneys all she possessed.

Mr. Forbes tore the letter into strips and threw them on the fire. His face had flushed as he read; and as he lay back in his chair, it relaxed somewhat.

"If she were here would I yield?" he thought. "I am thankful that she is not. Or am I? I don't know. What fools we mortals

be—in the hands of a woman. Five millions seem a small price to have her back. But to pay them, unfortunately, means the free gift of my self-respect. What is to come? What is to come? I had believed at times that this woman read my very soul and touched it. Her intuitions, her sympathy, her subtle comprehension of the highest wants of a man's nature and reverence for them amounted to something like genius. Indeed, she had a genius for loving—a most uncommon gift. Or so it seemed to me. But I think that few men would appreciate that they were idealising a woman like Virginia Forbes. And now? I am to take back the beautiful woman, the companionable mind, I suppose—nothing more. But it is something to have been a fool for twenty-two years. I cannot say that I have any regrets. And possibly it was my own fault that I could not make her love me better.”

He looked up at the picture. "Several times," he thought, "I have felt like mounting a chair and kissing it. And if I did, I should feel as if I were kissing the lips of a corpse."

"Ned! Are you there?"

Mr. Forbes rose instantly. The door had opened, and a tall woman, not unlike Augusta, but with something more of mellowness, had entered.

"I am glad to see you, Harriet," he said. "What brings you at this hour? Have you come to help me through my solitary dinner?"

"I will stay to dinner, certainly." Mrs. Van Rhuys took the chair he offered, and looked at him keenly. "I have just received a letter from Augusta," she said. "Do withdraw your opposition, Ned. Yield gracefully, before the world knows what it is beginning to suspect. And a man can never hold out

against his womankind. He might just as well give in at once and save wrinkles."

"What is your personal opinion of the Duke of Bosworth?" asked Mr. Forbes curtly.

"Well, I certainly should have chosen a finer sample of the English aristocracy for Augusta, but I cannot sympathise with your violent antipathy to him. His manners are remarkably good for an Englishman, and it would be one of the most notable marriages in American history."

"You women are all alike," said Mr. Forbes contemptuously. "Would you give your daughter to this man?"

"Assuredly. I am positive that when the little Duke settles down he will be all that could be desired. He has something to live for now. Poor thing! He has been hampered with debts ever since he came of age. The old Duke was a sad

profligate, but a very charming man. What it is I do not pretend to define, and I say it without any snobbishness, for I am devoted to New York; but there is something about the English aristocracy——”

“Oh!”—Mr. Forbes rattled the shovel among the coals—“Do, please, spare me. You’re all peer-bewitched, every one of you. Don’t let us discuss the subject any farther. It is loathsome to me, and I am ashamed of my womankind.”

“Are you determined to let Virginia sell her houses and jewels, Ned? It will break her heart.”

“She knew what she was doing when she struck the bargain. It was an entirely voluntary act on her part. I see no reason why she should not stand the consequences. Shall we go in to dinner?”

CHAPTER XX.

THE next evening Miss Forbes dressed for a dinner party in a very bad humour.

Her mother was prostrated with a violent headache and had been obliged to send an excuse.

"Such a dreadful thing to do," grumbled Augusta to her maid as she revolved before the pier glass. "Have you asked Marie the particulars? Is my mother really ill?"

"Dreadful, I believe, miss."

"It makes me feel heartless to leave her, but one of us must go, that is certain. Can I see her?"

"No, miss. She is trying to sleep."

"People may have an idea that the path

of an American heiress who is going to marry an English Duke is strewn with Jacqueminots; but I wish they knew what I have gone through in the last month. I wish to heaven papa would come over."

It was a bright and lively dinner given by a very young and newly-titled United Statesian, who treated the British peerage as a large and lovely joke, and was accepted on much the same footing. The Duke, who had pulled himself together since the swerve in his fortunes, looked something more of a man. His cheeks had more colour and his eye-belongings less. He held himself erectly and talked well. Augusta bored him hideously, but he reflected that a Duke need see little of his Duchess, and filled his present *rôle* creditably. Fletcher Cuyler as usual was the life of the company, and even Augusta forgot to be intellectual.

A theatre party followed the dinner. Augusta returned to the hotel a little after midnight. As she opened the door of the private drawing-room of Mrs. Forbes' suite, she saw with surprise that her mother was sitting by one of the tables.

"I thought you were in bed with a headache," she began, and then uttered an exclamation of alarm and went hastily forward.

Mrs. Forbes, as white as the dead, her hair unbound and dishevelled, her eyes swollen, sat with clenched hands pressed hard against her cheeks.

"Mother!" exclaimed Augusta. "You—you look terribly. How you must have suffered. Has the pain gone?"

"Yes, the pain has gone."

"Well, I am glad you are better——"

"It will be a long while before I am better. Oh, I want your father! Cable to him!"

Go for him! Do anything, only bring him here."

"I'll cable this minute if you are really ill. But what is the matter?"

Mrs. Forbes muttered something. Augusta bent her ear. "What?" she asked. Her mother repeated what she had said. As Augusta lifted her head her face was scarlet.

"Gracious goodness!" she ejaculated. "Who would ever have thought of such a thing?" She walked aimlessly to the window, then returned to her mother. "Well," she added, "it's nothing to be so upset about. It isn't as if it were your first. And papa will be delighted."

Mrs. Forbes flung her arms over the table, her head upon them, and burst into wild sobbing.

"Good heavens, mother, don't take on so," cried her daughter. "What good could papa do if he were here? I hope

I'll never have a baby if it affects one like that."

She hovered over her mother, much embarrassed. She was not heartless and would have been glad to relieve her distress; but inasmuch as she was incapable of such distress herself she comprehended not the least of what possessed her mother. She took refuge upon the plane where she was ever at home.

"I have always said," she announced, "that it is not a good thing for American men to spoil their wives as they do, and particularly as papa spoils you. Here you are in the most ordinary predicament that can befall a woman, and yet you are utterly demoralized because he is not here to pet you and make you think you are the only woman that ever had a baby. And upon my word," she added reflectively, "I believe he would be perfectly

happy if he were here. I can just see the fuss he would make over you——”

Here her mother's sobs became so violent that she was roused to genuine concern.

“I'll cable at once,” she said. “But what shall I cable? I don't know how to intimate such a thing, and I certainly can't say it right out.”

“I will write. Give me the things.” Mrs. Forbes raised her disfigured face and pushed back her hair. “It will make me feel better. Of course you cannot cable without alarming him, and he has had enough.”

Augusta brought the writing materials with alacrity. Mrs. Forbes wrote two lines. The tears splashed on the paper.

“Those will look like real tears,” said Augusta reassuringly. “Once I helped Mabel write a letter breaking off an en-

gagement, and she sprinkled it with the hair-brush. I am sure he must have guessed. Here, I'll send it right away, and then you'll feel better."

She summoned a bell-boy and dispatched the letter. "There!" she said, patting her mother's head. "He'll be sure to come over now, and all will go as merry as a marriage-bell—my marriage-bell. Tell me, mamma, don't you feel that this is a special little intervention of Providence to bring things about just as we want them? Aren't you glad that this is the end of doubt and worry, and that you can keep your houses and lovely jewels?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Forbes wearily. "I want nothing but my husband."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE week passed. No cable came from Mr. Forbes. His wife did not admit further disquiet. She knew his pride. He would come, but not with the appearance of hastening to her at the first excuse.

She went out as much as she could—filled every moment. A part of the trousseau arrived, and there were many things to be bought in London.

She needed all the distraction she could devise. Impatience and longing, regret and loneliness crouched at the four corners of her mind, ready to spring the moment her will relaxed. The gloomy skies contributed their quota. She was home-sick for the blue and white, the electric atmosphere of New York.

Nevertheless, when she was surrounded by admirers, during the hours wherein she was reminded that her haughty little head was among the stars, she was content, and had no thought of retreat.

The letter had left England on a Saturday. She reckoned that her husband would not receive it until the following Monday week. Making allowance for all delays, he could take the steamer that left New York on Wednesday.

On the Wednesday of the week succeeding she remained in her rooms all day. The time came and passed for the arrival of passengers by the "Cunard" line; but her husband had a strong preference for the "American," and she had made up her mind not to expect him before a quarter to nine in the evening—a slight break in the *St. Paul's* machinery had delayed its arrival several hours.

She was nervous and excited. Augusta

left the hotel and declared that she should not return until the "meeting was quite over." For the last week Mrs. Forbes had been haunted by visions of shipwreck, fire at sea, and sudden death. In these last hours she walked the floor torn by doubts of another nature. Suppose her husband would not forgive her, was disgusted, embittered? She had every reason to think that she had deep and intimate knowledge of him; but she knew that people had lived together for forty years before some crook of Circumstance had revealed the dormant but virile poison of their natures. Was bitter pride her husband's? For the first time she wished that she had never seen the Duke of Bosworth—retreated before the ambitions of a lifetime in detestation and terror. Every part of her concentrated into longing for the man who had made the happiness of her life. She even wished passionately that she had never had a daughter

to come between them, and with curious feminism loved the baby that was coming the more.

She went to the mirror and regarded herself anxiously. When in society, excitement gave her all her old rich vital beauty, but the reaction left her pale and dull. Would he find her faded? He had worshipped her beauty, and she would rather have walked out from wealth into poverty than have discovered a wrinkle or a grey hair. But she looked very lovely. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes sparkling. Her warm soft hair when hanging always enriched her beauty. She wore an Empire gown of pale pink satin cut in a high square about the throat.

“Oh, I look pretty enough,” she thought. “If he would only come!”

For the twentieth time she went to the clock. It was a few minutes to eight. The train was due at twenty minutes past. He

should be at the hotel by a quarter to nine at latest.

The next hour was the longest of her life. She assured herself that if there was such a result as retributive justice in this world it beat upon her in a fiery rain during those crab-like moments. There was nothing to momentarily relieve the tension, no seconds of expectation, of hope. The roll of cabs in the street was incessant. The corridors of the hotel were so thickly carpeted that she could not hear a foot-fall. Her very hands shook, but she dared not take an anodyne lest she should not be herself when he came.

She tried to recall the few quarrels of her engagement and their perturbing effect. They were such pale wraiths before this agitation, following years of intense living, and quickened with the full knowledge of the great possession she may have tossed to Memory, that they dissolved upon evocation. She sprang to

her feet again to pace the room. At that moment the door opened and her husband entered.

She had purposed to captivate him anew with her beauty, to shed several tears, perhaps, but not enough to blister and inflame. She flew across the room and flung herself about his neck and deluged his face with tears, as she sobbed, and kissed him, and protested, and besought forgiveness.

His face had been stern as he entered. Although the appeal of her letter was irresistible, he had no intention of capitulating without reserves; but no man that loved a woman could be proof against such an outburst of feeling and affection, and in a moment he was pressing her in his arms and kissing her.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE next morning Mr. Forbes had an interview with Augusta.

"I don't choose to discuss this matter of your engagement with your mother," he said, "so we will come to an understanding at once, if you please. Are you determined to marry this man, to take your mother's property in case I continue to refuse my consent?"

"Papa! What else can I do? The invitations are out. We should be the laughing-stock of two continents. Besides, I am convinced that Bertie is the one man I shall ever want to marry, and I cannot give him up."

"Very well. You and your mother have

beaten me. Fortunately, you are better able to stand the consequences of your acts than most women. I doubt if you will ever realize them. I have an attorney here. He will confer with the Duke's attorneys to-morrow. Only, be good enough to arrange matters so that I shall see as little as possible of your Duke between now and the wedding. Your mother and I shall return to America the day after the ceremony."

As Mr. Forbes left the room Augusta thoughtfully arranged the chiffon on the front of her blouse.

"Even a big man," she reflected, "a great big man, a man who can make Presidents of the United States, has no chance in the hands of two determined women. We are quite dangerous when we know our power."

She added after a moment:

"How gracefully he gave in. Dear papa! But that is the American of it. We never

sulk. We lose our temper. We come down with both feet. We even kick hard and long when we want or don't want a thing badly. But when we find that it's all no use, I flatter myself that we know how to climb down."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE next two weeks flashed by. Besides the accumulating details there were two visits to country houses and a daily breakfast or dinner. Mr. Forbes, who had many friends in London, had no time to be bored. Mrs. Forbes was happy and triumphant. Augusta's serene components pleasantly oscillated.

The wedding was very brilliant, but not gorgeous. Mrs. Forbes was far too clever to give society and the press an excuse to sneer at the "vulgar display of American dollars." St. George's was decorated with sufficient lavishness to make it appear a bower of delight after the drive through rain and mud, but suggested to no mind the possible cost.

Royalty came from Cannes. The church was crowded to the doors with the best blood in England. The dowager duchess, a stout plainly-garbed old lady, sat with her daughters and grandchildren. She looked placid and rather sleepy. Mrs. Forbes, who was gowned in violet velvet with a point lace vest of new device, was flanked by her husband's relatives and the United States Embassy. Augusta, in a magnificent bridal robe of satin and lace and pearls, her severely-cut features softened by the white mist of her veil, looked stately and imposing. The maidens who flanked her were not the friends of her youth, but their names were writ in the style of chivalry, and Augusta's equanimity was independent of sentiment. The Duke's bump of benevolence was on a level with her small well-placed ear, but he also looked his best.

As Mrs. Forbes listened to the words which affiliated her with several of the greatest houses in the history of Europe, she thrilled with gratified ambition and the more strictly feminine pleasure of having her own way. Suddenly her glance rested on her husband. He stood with his arms folded, his eyes lowered, an expression of bitter defeat on his face.

The blood dropped from her cheeks to her heart; the rosy atmosphere turned grey. "He says that he has forgiven me," she thought. "Has he? Has he? But I will make him! Any impressions can be effaced with time and persistence, and others that are ever present."

After the ceremony there was a breakfast at the Embassy. Only the members of the two families, the few intimate friends, and the bridesmaids were present. The company was barely seated when Fletcher

Cuyler rose, leaned his finger tips lightly on the table and glanced about with his affable and impish grin.

“Ladies and gentlemen, your attention if you please,” he commanded. “I wish the individually expressed thanks of each member of this assemblage. Not for being the happy instrument in bringing this auspicious marriage about—although I confess the imputation—but for a more immediate benefit, one which I have conferred equally upon each of you, and upon the many hundreds who were so fortunate as to witness the ceremony which bound together two of the most distinguished families of America and Great Britain. I allude to the wedding-march. You doubtless noticed that it was played as it should be, as it rarely is. I have attended twenty-two weddings in St. George’s——”

“Sit down, Fletcher,” said the First Sec-

retary impatiently. "What are you talking about? Do kindly take a back seat for once."

"On the contrary, I am entitled to a high chair in the front row. I played that march. You do not believe me? Ask the organist—when he is able to articulate. He is red-hot and speechless at present. I calmly approached him as he was pulling out his cuffs, and said: 'Young man (he is venerable, but I too am bald), 'move aside if you please. I am to play this wedding-march. The Duke of Bosworth is my particular friend. It is my way of giving him good luck. At once. There is the signal.' I fancy I hypnotized him. He slid off the stool mechanically. I lost no time taking his place. When he had recovered and was threatening police I was playing as even I had never played before. That is all."

Everybody laughed, the Duke more heartily than anyone. Fletcher was one of the few of life's gifts for which he was consistently thankful.

"You shall come with us to-day," he said, delighted with the sudden inspiration; and Fletcher, who had intended to go whether he was invited or not, graciously accepted.

The breakfast party was informal and gay. Toasts were given and the responses clever. Even Mr. Forbes, who had no idea of being a death's head at a feast, forced himself into his best vein.

The Duke drank a good deal of wine and said little. He was, on the whole, well content. Mr. Forbes had handed over two hundred thousand pounds with which to repair Aire Castle, and settled the income of eight hundred thousand pounds on the young people, the principal to go to

their children. The Duke reflected gratefully that he should have no cause to be ashamed of his bride. She was not beautiful, but even his relatives had approved of her manners and style. He forgave her for having bored him, for she had brought him a certain peace of mind; and she should have as many M.P.'s to talk political economy to as she (or they) listed. He would talk to Fletcher, and others.

Mrs. Forbes had her especial toasts. Even here, at this anti-climax dear to the heart of a bride, she was the personage. She looked regal and surpassing fair, for her eyes were very soft; and she had never been happier of speech. The Duke, who admired her with what enthusiasm was left in him, proposed a toast to which the Ambassador himself responded.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHEN it was over and Mr. Forbes and his wife had returned to the hotel, she put her hands on his shoulders and looked him in the eyes.

“Tell me,” she said imperiously; “have you really forgiven me? I have almost been sure at times that you had. I have felt it. But you have not been quite your old dear self. I want to hear you say again that you forgive me, and it is the last time that I shall refer to the subject.”

“Yes,” he said, adjusting a lock that had fallen over her ear, “I have forgiven you, of course. We are to live the rest of our lives together. I am not so unwise,

I hope, as to nurse offended pride and resentment."

The colour left her face. She came closer.

"Tell me!" she said, her voice vibrating. "Won't it ever be quite the same again? Is that what you mean?"

He took her in his arms and laid his cheek against hers. "Oh, I don't know," he said, "I don't know."

THE END.

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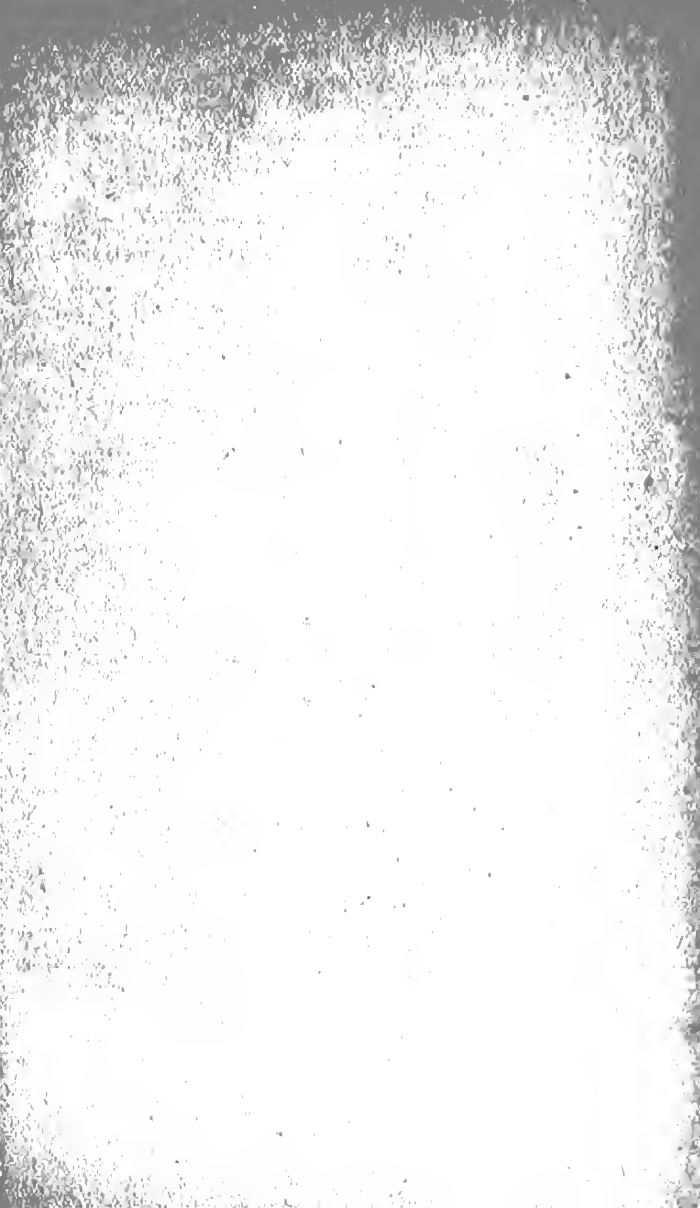
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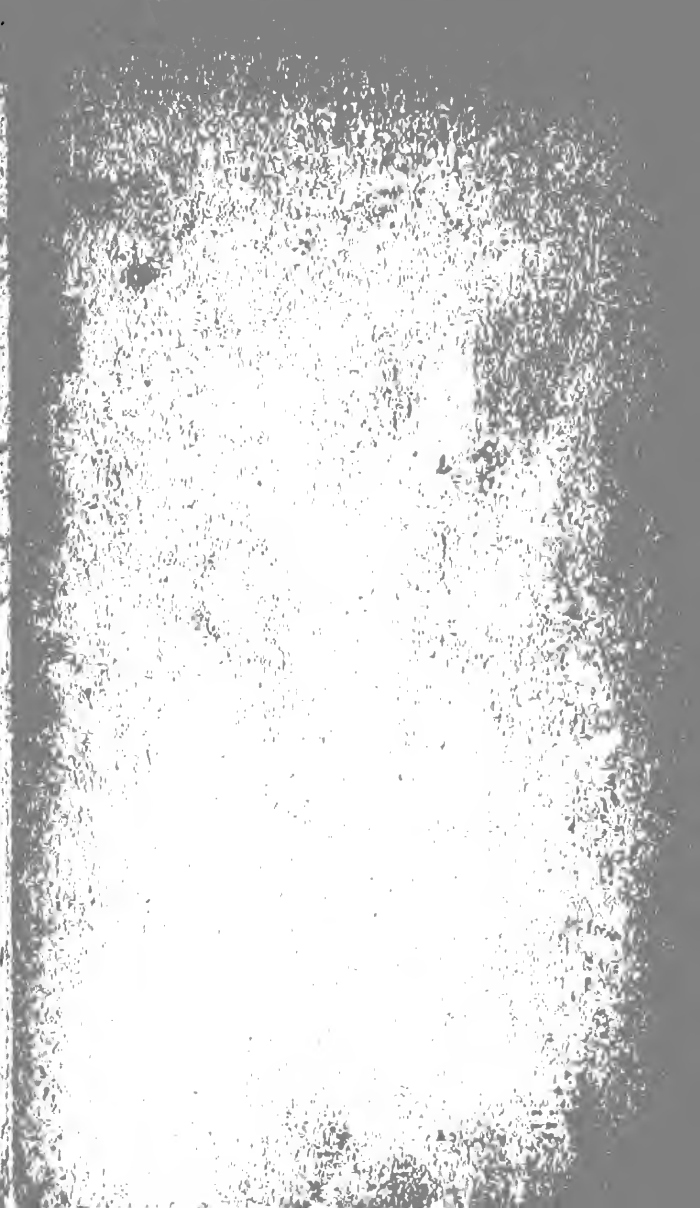
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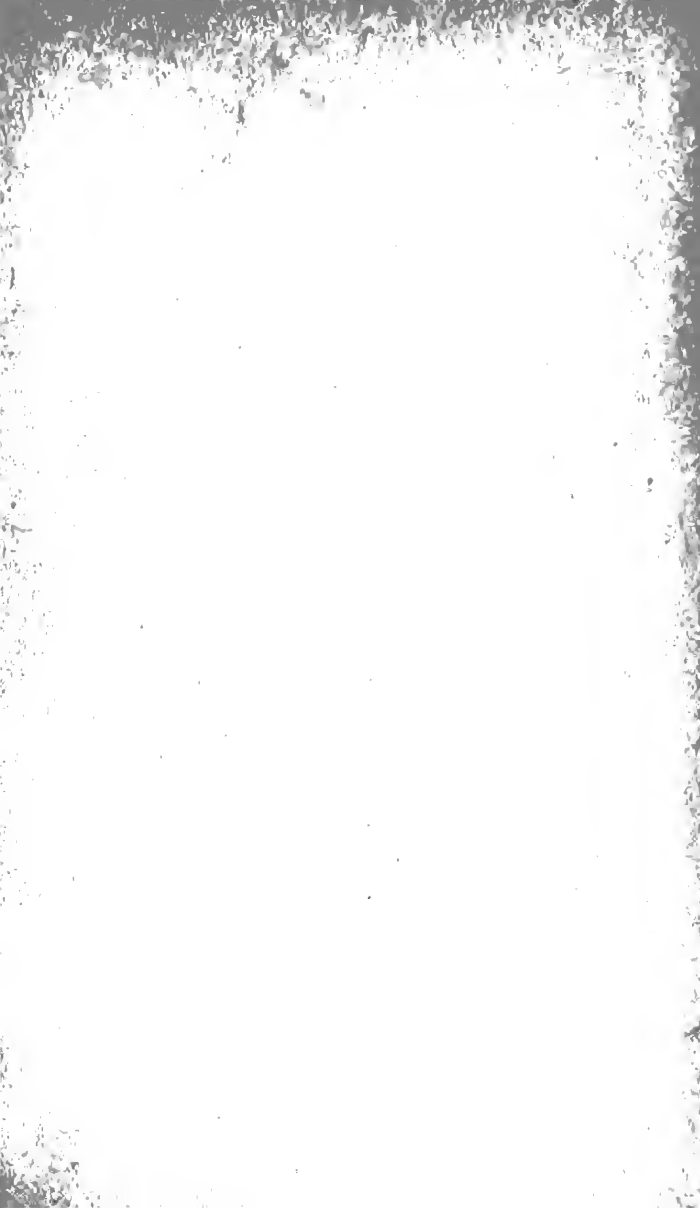
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